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THE

# LONDON READER

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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[THE LIPS BEGAN TO MOVE, AND THEN, WITH ALL HIS STRENGTH, ARMITAGE SENT HIS RIVAL CRASHING DOWN THE BANK.]

OH! GIVE HIM BACK TO ME!

## CHAPTER XIX.

### LADY JANE'S TELEGRAM.

"Oh, what will happen to him!" cried Lady Stapleton. "If I were a man I would go after him."

"I am a man, but I stoutly refuse to do anything so insane," said Ralph Armitage, coldly. "Don't bother yourself about him; he isn't worth it, I assure you."

"Not worth it! How can you tell?" flashing a quick glance into his face.

"I know more about him than you think," in a low voice, which filled her with alarm.

Had he guessed Jack's secret? But if so, why did he pretend to believe in Sartoris's death, and look quite tragic about it? She could not understand what he meant, and looked from his grave face to the telegram in his hand, which so unwittingly told a lie.

"You know nothing about him at all," she said boldly, though inwardly very nervous.

"I know a great deal, and I suspect still more," he answered, grimly, and then someone stepped forward and inquired if poor Mrs. Sartoris was to be told of her loss.

"Certainly not!" said Lady Stapleton, hastily. "I would not tell her for the whole world!"

"But surely that would be a great mistake?" and Armitage frowned. In his eagerness, he longed to be the first to break the news, in order to find out at the moment of the shock what had been her real state of feeling towards her husband. If she had never loved Sartoris, her grief would not be so intense as to prevent her from being led easily into love by somebody else, especially if that someone else had earned her eternal gratitude by saving her life.

"Dear Lady Stapleton," he went on, earnestly, "do let me persuade you to tell her at once; you can do it so gently and carefully; or, if you like it better, I will tell her myself?"

"Are you mad?" and Lady Stapleton opened her eyes in horror. "Are we to be in such a hurry to tell her that she's a widow before we know that the man is dead?"

"But the man is dead," tapping the pink form impatiently. "Jane says so; and she wouldn't say it unless she knew it was true. We haven't seen the evening papers. Evidently some one brought the last edition down to the Forresters. It is strange—awfully strange!" his voice growing awe-struck. "Jane had a presentiment about the other accident, and now he's done for somehow."

"It was very good of Lady Jane to take so much interest in my niece's husband," a certain asperity in her tone.

"They were old friends—poor fellow! I knew him tolerably well years ago. I liked him then, but lately I've been devoutly wishing him out of the way."

"Then you were almost as good as your sister"—sarcastically. "Jack would be very much obliged to you"; and then it came across her that she had forgotten the part she ought to play, as she caught a look of grave surprise on Armitage's face. Hurriedly she wiped her dry eye-lashes with a delicate handkerchief, which refused to look damp, and heaved a tremendous



sigh, which was echoed sympathetically by several others.

A solemn silence fell upon all, in the midst of which came a crash of thunder, which seemed to make the whole house tremble. The women looked terrified, and moved en masse towards the drawing-room, as if they thought they would be safer amongst the pretty nick-nacks, the comfortable couches, Persian mats, &c., than in the hall.

"Let me see, when did it happen?" a Major Graves asked Armitage, as they brought up the rear.

"We only know that he is dead. How, when, or where remains to be found out."

"Who is dead?" said a soft voice behind him, and turning quickly, he saw Violet close at his heels with Landon, looking almost haggard, and deathly white. He was so taken aback, that the colour rushed up into his face, and he remained quite silent.

"We are afraid that somebody may be killed," said the Major, looking kindly down into the pretty frightened face, and saying the first thing that came into his head. "The lightning looks dangerous."

A small hand clutched Armitage's sleeve.

"Why don't you speak?" trembling from head to foot. "You are keeping something back. I must know—I will know." Her agitation increasing, Ralph looked round in dismay, but the ladies had gone into the drawing-room, and the whole responsibility of what was to be said rested on him alone.

"Where's Mr. St. John?" she asked eagerly. "He won't refuse to tell me. Go and fetch him."

"I can't. He's not here. He's gone out."

"Gone out!" catching hold of the corner of a card-table, and swaying as if in a wind. "Oh, heavens! I told him to go, and he's gone, and you say he's dead!"

"Nothing of the sort," fiercely. "He's as well as you are yourself, and a great deal better."

She put her hand to her head. Cyril asked a question of Major Graves, who told him in a whisper all they knew. A rush of joy had passed over Violet's heart, and she waited a moment to steady herself. Her voice, nevertheless, had a tremble in it, as she said, "Then who is it? You must tell me please. Is it? Is it?"—she was going to say, "my husband," but the words seemed to cleave to her tongue.

Cyril guessed her meaning in a moment, and drew her hand through his arm, for he knew how her poor little heart was fluttering. "It is a friend of Jane's, and Armitage is interested about him as well."

She looked up at him with trusting eyes, her lips still quivering. "You wouldn't deceive me, would you?"

"None of us want to deceive you," he said, gently; "only Lady Stapleton thought there was no use in telling you till we knew."

"Then it must be a friend of mine, or she wouldn't care. Tell me his name!" imperatively.

Armitage looked at Landon breathlessly; but Cyril did not lose his presence of mind, and told the truth when he seemed to be telling a lie. "Dalrymple," he said quietly, and neither of the other men recollected that that was Sartoris's second name.

"Dalrymple!" said Violet, with a deep-drawn breath. "Then that must be a cousin of—of the Sartoris's?"

"Some relation," said Landon, composedly. "And now, if you will take my advice, you'll go straight off to bed. Do you know it is midnight?"

"I couldn't sleep till this storm is over," with a shiver, as the lightning flashed through the diamond-paned windows, and she thought of the one who was wandering alone in the storm outside; "and it doesn't matter about me. How are you?" looking anxiously into his face, in a way that angered Armitage.

Would the day ever come that she would look at him—the man who had actually saved

her life—as if she had a particle of interest in him?

"Do you feel better?"

"Oh, I'm all right!" cheerfully. "Do you suppose I made a fuss about a knock on my head at Eton?"

"Who gave you the knock?" said Armitage, quickly, as a sudden suspicion shot across his mind that something had been happening of which he knew nothing.

St. John had looked like the hero of a tragedy, Landon was like a ghost, Mrs. Sartoris was looking strangely upset before she heard a word about the telegram. What could it be?

"I had a fall," Cyril said, quietly. "I don't exactly know how it happened."

"Those mats in the library are so dangerous, you know," put in Violet hurriedly. "It is so easy to catch your foot."

"There are other things dangerous besides mats," and Armitage looked at her keenly. "Strange that St. John never mentioned a word about the accident."

"St. John! How should he know anything about it?" asked Cyril, with interest, for he had never known who his assistant was, and had only a dim idea that he had seen him standing over him when he revived.

"How could he?" exclaimed Violet, with an attempt at innocence, which deceived neither Armitage nor Major Graves. "Oh, here you are, Annie!" in a tone of relief, as Lady Stapleton appeared on the threshold of the drawing-room. "I want you to tell Cyril that he can't go home to-night."

"But indeed I must, Mabel would be terrified."

"Mrs. Landon would be much more terrified if you were brought in on a hurdle. Of course you will stay. It isn't fit for a dog to be out, or I would send a messenger to the Lodge. I will speak to my housekeeper; and, Violet, I'm going to carry you off at once."

Cyril bade Lady Stapleton good-night, and thanked her, then quietly slipped away, saying something about "a smoke." Not long after the sound of horse's hoofs was heard in the stable, for nothing would induce him to frighten his young wife by staying at Holly Bank when he had no means of letting her know where he was.

He reached home safely, and was rewarded by the cry of delight with which Mabel threw herself into his arms.

"Not in bed!—you naughty child!" he said, lovingly, as he kissed the tears from her cheeks.

"No. How could I rest till I know you were safe? Oh, this night has seemed as long as twenty!"

"I wish I could have come before!" regretfully; "but all sorts of things have been happening. Do you know they say that Sartoris is dead?"

"Oh, poor Violet!" her eyes filling with ready sympathy.

"Some people think it is a good riddance," sitting down wearily on the sofa.

Mabel looked at her husband with critical eyes. She had never seen him look so ill and out of spirits. Was it possible that he was regretting that he was not free as well as Violet?

A dart like the thrust of a sharp knife went through her heart, and for a moment the pretty room where they had spent so many happy hours together swam round before her eyes.

"But you don't? You are not glad, Cyril?" she asked, with a throb in her voice.

"It seems a terrible thing to say, but I am glad," looking down at the carpet, as if he were studying it. "Now the poor girl is free, and may have a chance of happiness."

"How cruel of you! She must have loved him once, and now he is gone—gone without forgiveness."

"He had nothing to forgive."

"We can't say that. There may have been something—we don't know."

"Nothing!" emphatically. "I know enough of Violet to swear to that!"

"Oh, you'd swear to anything for her!" in an offended tone.

"Well, I won't swear I haven't a headache," with a tired smile. "I've had a knock on my forehead."

"A knock, and you never told me!" all her jealousy vanishing in a moment as her devoted wifely affection came to the fore. "Where is it? Oh, Cyril!" as a black bruise caught her eye, which had been half-hidden under his hair.

In spite of the lameness which still affected her powers of walking she would not let anyone else wait upon him, but busied herself to supply all his wants.

Her favourite remedies were applied to the bruise, and a soft handkerchief, soaked in eau de Cologne, tied over it.

Cyril laughed at the fuss she made, and declared the eau de Cologne ran down into his eyes; but he was really feeling very bad, and was thankful to lay his head upon the pillow, with his wife's small hand clasped in his.

And there was not a thought in his heart that she might not have known, though Violet Sartoris was said to be free.

Why was it that fate made these two innocent people—Violet Sartoris and Cyril Landon—objects of jealousy to so many loving hearts?

## CHAPTER XX.

"HAY, YOU LOVE HIM!"

Was this fearful feeling of unrest? Why this constant presentiment of evil? The other members of the household had all gone to bed in spite of the storm, though the thunder still crashed overhead, and the lightning flashed its fiery darts, and a wild wind blew in sudden gusts that threatened to break the ancient elms and bring their proud heads down into the mire.

The house was silent as the grave as Violet stole out of her room and drew the heavy curtain aside from the large window of the boudoir. The branches were swaying and tossing in the wind; the clouds were scudding past; and one beat its wing against the glass, and uttered a plaintive scream, like a prayer for deliverance, from into the darkness. It was an ill-omened cry—the cry that precedes some dread disaster, and her heart sank as she heard it.

"Mrs. Sartoris, what are you doing here?" asked Armitage's voice, lowered to a whisper, close to her shoulder.

She started violently, and wished him a hundred miles away.

"I could not go to bed with all this noise going on. I should not have slept a wink."

"Nor I. I feel as if I had enough to-night to keep me awake for the rest of my life."

"Ah, then you are frightened, like I am. Isn't it awful?"

"Awful? No. Come in here," pushing open the door of Lady Stapleton's boudoir: "you will be more out of the draught; and you can watch the storm just as well."

Violet followed him into the room, rather glad of his companionship for the first time in her life; for the loneliness in the silent house, in her present state of mind, had added to her alarm. She was still in her simple white evening dress, and he was in a gorgeous smoking-jacket, having just come from the smoking-room, where he had been drinking brandy-and-water, and reading a French novel, from which his thoughts strayed constantly to the very woman who was now alone with him in that quiet room.

He lit the candles on the mantelpiece with a match from his pocket, whilst she walked towards the window and shrouded herself behind the velvet curtains. He looked after her, and his pulses throbbed as he thought of that telegram from his sister. She would never have sent it unless the news were true; therefore Violet Sartoris was free to be wooed



and won; and there was no reason why he should not be the one to win the prize—no reason if that fellow St. John were only out of the way. Carse him!—curse him a thousand times!

And then he went up to her, and asked her what she was looking for, knowing what the answer ought to be if she spoke the truth.

"I like watching the lightning," she said, evasively. "Do you think it is very dangerous?"

"I hope not, for Mrs. Landon's sake. Cyril had a long ride home."

"Yes, but his horse is so quiet, and that other one is so spirited," her voice trembling as she thought of the beautiful thoroughbred who had carried his master so well.

Where was that master now? She would have given every jewel she possessed to have found a satisfactory answer to that question.

"What do you mean? St. John was on foot," looking down into her anxious face with angry eyes.

The colour rushed into her face, and she turned her eyes away.

"Some one told me that he went into the stables and saddled his own horse, and rode off at a mad pace."

"So much the better. He has fled from discovery, and we can let him go, can't we? Look here, dearest! Nobody on earth would take better care of you than I should. Won't you let this fellow go, and trust yourself to me?"

His voice was hoarse with excitement, and he tried to put his arm round her, but she shrank from him in horror and loathing.

"How dare you insult me?" she cried, with flashing eyes. "But you are mistaken if you think I have no one to take care of me. I have a brother; and I would rather trust myself to the veriest tramp in the road than to you!"

He drew a deep breath, and placed himself before her as she tried to escape.

"How have I insulted you?"

She drew herself up like an insulted queen.

"By forgetting that I am a married woman."

"Then you would forgive me if I told you that I thought you were free?" his wild heart beating like a hundred hammers.

Some of the anger passed away, and the old puzzled look came back to her lovely eyes.

"Free?" she repeated, vaguely. "How could I be free?"

"Your marriage was no marriage at all. You parted from your husband on your wedding-day. Sartoris deserted you. I, Ralph Armitage, saved your life. Which do you belong to most?"

She stepped back, and held up her hands to shield herself from the glow in his eyes. Their gaze seemed to scorch her; his words troubled her brain.

He was a man of the world, a gentleman. Surely he would not tell her a lie? Could the solitary years that had passed wipe away all meaning from those words—"Till death us do part?"

And then with one bound her thoughts leapt from the man before her to that other man whom she had sent out into the storm.

Now—now, when he was in danger, she knew that she loved him. The mere thought of him seemed like fire in her veins; and she was told she was free—free to love him; free to give herself to him; free to be happy as if Heaven had come down from the heights above to those grovelling depths below.

Her eyes shone, an ecstatic smile played round her lips. For a moment she rejoiced in her unfaded youth, in the beauty which her glass told her was as glorious as ever, in the radiant possibilities of the future.

"Answer me—to which do you belong most?"

His question scarcely reached her intelligence, or roused her from her dream. But with a sweet smile, she said softly—"If it weren't for you, I should not be here now."

His face lighted up. "And are you glad to be here—here with me?"

No answer, but he took her small hands in his, and she did not draw them away. A strangely rapt expression came over her face; in fancy, she was listening to another's voice, and thrilling under the touch of another's hand.

But Ralph could not guess this; his heart was lifted up on the wings of unexpected hope, and every pulse was throbbing. Thank Heaven, Sartoris was dead, and no dishonour could touch her through his love.

He stooped over her, the most passionate words welling up from his heart to his willing tongue, when the storm broke forth with new violence and strength, a tall elm became a sheet of flame, and whilst burnt, and scorched, and blackened by the lightning, was torn up by the roots through the force of the wind, and flung prostrate on the ground, carrying a May-tree with it on its way.

Violet stood still in breathless fear, as the window-frame rattled, and the very floor under her feet seemed to shake with the roll of the thunder. The glory of her dream was roughly dispelled, and with a piteous cry she exclaimed, "Oh! think of him, think of him! Would to Heaven I could save him!"

Armitage's face darkened. "Why should I think of anyone else? You are all the world to me!"

"Mr. Armitage, you must not talk to me like that;" as if she suddenly awoke to the consciousness that he was behaving more like a lover than a friend. "I—I think I'm half mad to-night. But oh! if you've a grain of pity in your heart, try to save him if you can."

"Whom do you mean?" his voice cold and hard.

"Mr. St. John!" very low.

"You want me to save that man?" fiercely.

"Why?"

"Do you want a reason?" her lips trembling. "Wouldn't Christian charity make you try to save a life?"

"I wouldn't stir an inch."

"He is an old friend of my aunt's."

"That does not affect me."

She clasped her hands in despair.

"Say you love him—and upon my honour I'll go."

With a cruel delight he watched her keenly, knowing that she would almost die rather than confess the truth. Her head drooped, her bosom heaved.

"Well, am I to go or not?"

"Go," in a low voice.

"Then you confess that you love him."

With a groan, she murmured "Yes."

He ground his teeth and threw back his head, whilst she felt as if she must sink through the ground.

There was a sinister light in his eyes as he marked the exceeding grace of her slight girlish figure, as she leant against the window-frame with drooping head. There was not another woman in the world to be compared to her, and there was no longer any barrier between them.

His soul went out to her with a great, irresistible longing, and he felt that he would rather be hanged than give her up to this interloper and impostor.

"Mrs. Sartoris," he said, hoarsely, "if I find St. John alive and well—if I ask him to come back, and he refuses—if he says he can never claim your love, neither now nor in the future—"

He paused, whilst she turned away her face that he might not see the smile that hovered on her lips, that shone out of her eyes. Would he refuse? She didn't think so.

"If he stays away, and proves himself the impostor that I say he is—"

"Only find him—never mind the rest."

"But I must mind the rest. Do you think I am going out into this detestable weather without some promise of a reward?"

"No, no; only say what you want!" in a fever of impatience.

"I want you—failing St. John. Will you?"

There was no possibility of misunderstanding.

ing his meaning. He wanted her to be his wife. He would not go unless she gave at least a conditional promise, and yet, till only an hour or two ago she had thought herself for six years the wife of another man.

Was that marriage in the Abbey a dream? Did six years' absence constitute a plea for divorce, or abrogate a marriage without further trouble?

Her brain reeled; she caught hold of the window-frame because the floor seemed to be moving under her feet.

"You know I can't," she gasped. "Why—why do you ask me?"

"I swear you can. Answer yes or no. Say yes, and I'll go," looking down at her troubled face with pitiless eyes.

"Oh, go—go!" wringing her hands. "I will promise anything I can!"

"Listen—I'm telling you the truth. You have no husband!"

She staggered back as some cloud seemed to clear away from her brain. Through the long vista of years she saw him—Jack Sartoris—his handsome face turned towards hers, his honest blue eyes looking down into hers, his warm, strong grasp holding her hands so tenderly; and throwing up her arms in passionate yearning, she cried "Jack!" and fell in a heap on the floor.

Armitage, without waiting to see the effect of his words, dismayed by the sound of footsteps in a distant corridor, had vanished quickly from the room.

If anyone saw him and Mrs. Sartoris together at that hour of the night what food it would give for scandal!

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE BRAND OF CAIN.

RALPH ARMITAGE went out into the stormy night in a curiously excited state of mind. He determined that everything he did at the beginning should be done publicly; therefore, he roused up one of the grooms, and told him that he wanted a horse at once, as he was going out to look for Mr. St. John. James stared sleepily, and suggested that Mr. St. John would not be likely to be out on the roads at that time; there wasn't a bird or a beast who didn't try for a shelter somewhere.

"I know that; but the ladies are anxious, so I said I would do my best."

"Shall I come with you, sir; it seems safer for two than one alone?" inwardly hoping that the answer would be "no," but knowing that he would get a scolding from his mistress if he didn't offer.

Mr. Armitage declined all assistance, mounted hastily, and rode out of the yard into the wild and stormy weather, ready to face any danger that could bring Violet Sartoris nearer to him.

She had sent him off to bring rescue and help to another man, without any more thought or care about his own safety than if he had been a mere machine guaranteed against all accidents. His heart was full of rage and bitterness, and dark resolve. He was to find this man St. John, but he was not going to be such a fool as to bring him back.

He took the road to Farndon Court, feeling sure that that was the place to which St. John would naturally turn.

It was a long ride, and anything might have happened to him on the way—or anything might happen supposing he had not reached the end yet.

Ralph was tolerably satisfied with his own position. Jack Sartoris was dead, and this other man had some guilty secret, which he had half-discovered. There must be some crime in the background, or why did he change his names according to his place of residence? An alias was always suspicious.

The darkest thoughts, like the flashes of lurid lightning, kept darting through his mind. St. John must never return. If the worst came to the worst, he must be stopped

by force. There was surely evidence enough to have him arrested. A man who called himself by one name at Farndon Court, and another at Holly Bank, must be a scoundrel and an impostor.

Violet Sartoris must be saved at all hazards from marrying a man who might one day have to stand in the criminal dock. Yes, at all hazards!

Good heavens! what a night it was! As the branches of the trees tossed their arms wildly over his head, and swayed backwards and forwards, now this way, now that way in the wind; as the pitchy darkness was every now and then lighted up by a red flash, which seemed about to bring death on its lurid wing; as the thunder growled like the voice of a god in anger. Violet had not cared a straw whether his horse took fright; whether he lost his seat and came with a crash to the ground; whether the lightning slew him with its deadly flash; whether a tree in falling crushed the life out of him.

All these dangers were to be braved by him in order that St. John might be saved.

A grim smile crossed his lips. Of all people in the world he was the last whom she ought to have sent to save the man he hated.

Why not have asked Landon, who was a cut above the rest of mankind, and would have risked his life any day to save his bitterest enemy; or Graves, who had no grudge against the fellow; or the grooms, who would have been obliged to obey orders, however much they hated the job, and been comforted by the thought of a possible fiver?

No; it was Fate sent him—Fate, who always provides tools for the unscrupulous, opportunities for the criminal; and so he had come out with life in his hand and death in his heart, more ready to destroy than to save.

"Steady good horse!" patting Pinafore's neck. "We've had enough of this, haven't we?"

But, though he felt he might reasonably come back after having gone so far on a fruitless errand something drew him on.

Was it the tempter leading him on to crime? Was it his better self urging him to persevere, and not give up before his task was done?

On, further and further, down the wind-swept road, where not a single living creature was moving except himself and his horse; further still, with darkness behind him and darkness before, and nothing to guide him but the outline of the hedges on either side, seen every now and then in the flame of the lightning.

This was the sort of expedition to suit a good Samaritan, or one who had worn the Genevan Cross; but Ralph Armitage was a man who loved his ease, and would have thought twice before crossing a muddy road to pick up a fallen child.

He hated the rain which dashed into his eyes and soaked him to the skin; the wind, which would long ago have robbed him of his hat if he had not taken care to secure it to his button-hole; the thunder, which seemed to speak to his guilty conscience, and warn him of the doom which awaits the sinner.

He hated it all, and cursed the man who had brought this on him; but he knew that he would be more than amply paid if Violet were true to her word.

Great heavens! how he loved her!—not with the love that Cyril Landon felt for his fragile wife, but with a fierce, overmastering passion that would brook no opposition, that had no generosity in it, no self-sacrifice, and nothing unobnoxious, because it was essentially of the earth earthy.

Hark! there was a sound—the neighing of a horse. It sounded quite weird in the whistling of the wind. Ralph thought of Trumpeter; but he smiled at the fancy. What would Trumpeter be doing out there—even a horse has a strong objection to such a storm as this.

The trees met in an arch overhead like the aisle of a church, and straight on ahead there

was a stone bridge over what was usually a quiet trout stream.

Now it was a brawling river, whirling broken hurdles and uprooted trees with resistless force on its rapid course.

Armitage pulled up as he neared the bridge, for his quick eye caught sight of something blocking up the way.

It was a horse standing right across the road, the reins hanging loosely over his head, his nose thrust into the brushwood at the side. One glance told Armitage that it was Trumpeter, the beautiful thoroughbred which belonged to St. John.

He sprang to the ground, and looked round. The horse lifted its head and whinnied, shaking nervously, either with cold or fear.

Armitage knew that some horses were as capable of devoted attachment to their masters as dogs, and felt certain that St. John was close at hand.

He unstrapped a small lantern which the groom had lent him, shaded it from the wind between himself and Pinafore, and lighted it with a match.

Then he held it out till its light streamed upon dripping leaves and broken branches, with the river foaming at the bottom of the steep bank.

He had no need to look further. There, close in front of him, lay the man he was looking for; his heart stood almost still when he found him at his feet.

A hat was caught in the branch of a thorn. That branch was all that remained of the tree, which was blackened and scathed and ruined for ever by the electric fluid.

The flash must have passed close to St. John, for his coat was scorched, and as he turned his face upwards and scanned it with critical eyes, he saw that the beard was singed and the features blackened.

For a moment he thought that his rival was dead, and his heart gave a bound. Hastily he thrust his hand inside the overcoat, the fine cambric shirt, and found a faint pulsation.

All was not over yet. He had come in time to save him. Either his horse had thrown him, or he had been struck down by the lightning, and if he (Ralph Armitage) had not appeared upon the scene there he would have lain face downwards, and possibly have been suffocated in the tangle of wet leaves and mosses.

Armitage put his hand to his forehead, and remained just as he was, with his knees on the wet sods, deep in thought; but though his body was so still his thoughts flew through his brain like ill-omened birds on the wings of the storm.

So many courses lay open to him. He might pass a few drops of brandy from the flask he had brought with him, through St. John's lips, and then when he had revived help him on his horse, and take him home to Holly Bank. He could imagine with what joy he would be received, and how he himself would be forgotten.

He could go away, and leave him there just as he was, and trust to chance that he would never recover; or, he could make quite sure that this man whom he hated should never trouble him again. The choice lay in his own hands. Sin seemed to beckon him.

A cold sweat broke out upon his forehead, his heart beat like twenty; he started wildly as Trumpeter stamped and shook his dainty head.

Confound the horse, couldn't he stand still for a moment! He looked round savagely at the animal, and then back at his master's face. How still it was in its chiselled beauty—a face that women were sure to love!

Yes, curse it! a face that had stolen the heart of Violet Sartoris, when no one else could move it. He thought of her, with the tears in her eyes, and a prayer on her lovely lips longing for his return; and moved by a sudden impulse of frantic jealousy he seized the helpless body; the eyes opened, and looked him straight in the face. The lips began to

move, and then with all his strength, Armitage sent his rival crashing down the bank. He listened breathlessly till a sullen splash, which sent the spray up into his eager face, told him that St. John had gone from out of his path for ever, and then he drew back with a convulsive shudder. A shivering as of palsy seized him.

That last look bewildered his brain. Those eyes seemed to be the eyes of a man whom he had not seen for years. The truth flashed upon him in one awful moment. He saw it as if written in fire before his eyes. St. John was Jack Sartoris, and this was the meaning of the alias!

He had killed Violet's husband! The telegram was a lie, but this was the truth. Violet would hate him if she only knew; Jane would curse the day that he was born. He had done to death an old friend, who had done him no wrong; for surely a man may make love to his own wife.

He stepped forward, caught hold of a branch and looked down into the wide whirl of the waters. A man full of energy and strength, with all his faculties on the alert, would have had a hard struggle for life with the force of the current. A man in a state of syncope had not the slightest chance. The first splash signed his death-warrant; and then, as he saw what he had done, and knew that even then, in the gloom and the darkness, the eye of Heaven could see him, a great terror seized him, he stumbled back through the wet branches, found his horse, felt for the stirrup with fingers that were shaking like a frightened child's, managed to mount, although his knees knocked together, and his teeth chattered, and dashed homewards, as if pursued by a host of fiends.

Whilst Trumpeter, riderless and forgotten, followed close at his heels like an accuser, the stirrups knocking against its glossy flanks, the bridle hanging loose and broken; and raising his head every now and then with a dismal neigh, as if asking for his master!

(To be continued.)

## IVY'S PERIL.

—10:—

### CHAPTER X.—(Continued.)

"And I believed it," said John, firmly. "I never told a lie in my life, Mr. Beresford. The master went off in a cab in a fearful hurry, and I heard him tell the man to drive for his life. Well, you hadn't been gone ten minutes yesterday when back he came. I declare you might have knocked me down with a feather. I thought at first it was his ghost; then I fancied he had seen you come in, and was going to make a fuss about it, but he never said a word of the sort. He just told me he had missed the train, and I was to send off a telegram to Mrs. Austin at once, and then get him a bit of dinner quietly at the office."

"I never was so taken aback," said John, after waiting to see whether Mr. Beresford wished to ask him any questions. "Generally the master's the man to say a thing and stick to it, and I know there was time to catch the train if the man had gone at a decent pace. Well, he ate his dinner and drank his wine as naturally as possible, then he sent me for a cab and went off again."

"And why did you come here?"

"Because I didn't want you to think I deceived you yesterday. I don't mind telling you, you can't see Mr. White if he orders me to, and I don't see I can help refusing his address if he says no one's to have it, but I don't mean to tell lies for him. When I said he'd gone by the one o'clock train I believed it, Mr. Beresford."

"I am sure you did."

"And I stand by my promise, sir. If you



come early on Monday morning you shall see him; I'll manage it somehow."

It was a great relief to Paul when Sunday came and he could present himself in Harley-street. His gloomy anticipations of ill were dispelled at the first sound of Mrs. Ward's voice. He felt she was in her husband's confidence, even before she said quietly,—

"Papa and Mark have told me of your troubles, Mr. Beresford, and I am so sorry for you; but you must keep up your courage. Papa never fails in anything he undertakes; so you must trust the shadow of his success will hover over you too."

"As a proof of my infallibility, Mr. Beresford," said the old gentleman, merrily, "the invaluable Tibbie is to be lent you. The comely widow is quite prepared to pack up at a moment's notice and start for unknown regions."

"You shall see her presently," said Mary Ward. "I assure you you will have a devoted assistant. Tibbie was very fond of poor Mrs. Gresham."

It was a pleasant family gathering. Paul found himself as much at home as though the Wards had been friends of long standing. Molly and the children retired after dessert, but the three men gathered round the fire, and Paul told the story of John Dudley's visit.

"Of course he saw you as he was hurrying to the station, and stayed in town that he might get a hint of your movements. I don't suspect the boy, but I fancy White is not a man to stick at much, I shouldn't wonder if he followed you about all that afternoon."

"If I had only seen him."

"He was probably disguised."

"Well, to-morrow will soon be here."

"And you have decided on a course of action."

"To be sure. I mean to ask him where he has taken my darling."

"You don't understand my question. Are you going to him as friend or foe?"

"As foe, decidedly."

"Then you will fail."

"What do you advise?"

"Ignore all ill-feeling on his part; be friendly and civil, shake hands effusively, and say how sorry you are to have missed the letter containing his seaside address, which must have got to Scotland just after you left."

"But why should I be such a consummate hypocrite?"

"Simply you force him to speak."

"But I couldn't shake hands with him."

"You had better. Soap and water will wash off the indignity."

"I would far rather tell him what I think of him."

"And redouble your Ivy's peril?"

Paul groaned.

"But he must know I don't feel friendly to him."

"Not in the least! If you adopt the course I advise you, thrust all the onus of explanation on to him. If you go your own rash way he will probably say he does not care to be insulted in his own office, and calmly turn you out, declining to hold any further communication with you."

"Dr. Ward, you are a wonderful man; you seem to know everything."

Mark laughed.

"I have bought my experience pretty dear; but seriously, Beresford, you will be very foolish if you quarrel openly with this man."

"I suppose you are right, but to shake hands with the wretch who is trying to kill my darling!"

"You don't know he is trying?"

"You said so."

"No. I own such is my fear, but I don't think I stated it as a fact. Mr. Beresford, I wish you were a more cautious man. I am afraid you will ruin all by a little lack of care."

"But how can I help it?"

"I don't know. Have you no intimate friend you could take with you to-morrow, who knows all your circumstances?"

Paul shook his head.

"I don't think I have an intimate friend in the world. And Sir John was so anxious for our engagement to be kept a secret that no one knows of it."

"Does Mr. Ainslie know?"

"Yes."

"Then we have the very person. I will just look at Bradshaw."

He rang for the guide, studied it attentively, and then pushed it from him with a sigh.

"If we had only thought of it last night! We might telegraph—but even then he could not be here in time."

"He would have been the very man."

"Yes. You need not have breathed a word of your fears about Miss Carew's safety; you could have taken Mr. Ainslie to the office just as a natural thing, and if you had asked in his presence for Miss Carew's address it would have been a very awkward task to refuse it."

"But it is too late."

"I fear so."

"Then I must go alone."

"I'd go in a minute," said John Milton, warmly; "but I own I share your infirmity. I have not Mark's caution, and if I suspect a man of being a villain I have a habit of telling him so."

Paul just glanced at the Doctor. Mark understood the unspoken entreaty.

"I would go with you in a moment, but that it is more than probable I should be recognised as the doctor he hoodwinked long ago. That would be a fatal step, and I could not effect a suitable disguise in time to be of any use."

"Of course he will refuse to let me see her. I am quite prepared for that, but I must say I marvel what reasons he will allege."

"The bogus cablegram."

"Well, by this time to-morrow I shall know all. I wish I felt hopeful."

"Oh, nonsense!" returned John Milton.

"You're just a little down, that's all. I think myself it would be an excellent plan to telegraph for that person fellow. As it is, of course he could not get here in time for the appointment, but he might be of great use later on."

"I will send the telegram the moment I have seen White."

"Provided you do see him."

Paul was not without a little doubt on that subject himself. He felt John Dudley's will was good to serve him, but he rather questioned his power; still this eager fear did not prevent his being at his goal very punctually at half-past nine.

John Dudley was there before him.

"I'm going into the master's den to tidy up," said the clerk quietly; "he will be here in a few minutes, and as he must pass through that door you can't fail to see him, Mr. Beresford."

Perhaps no time had ever seemed so long to Paul in his whole life as those "few minutes." He was opposite a clock, and could therefore tell exactly how long he waited, and though he could have declared it was hours, the minute-hand had made but one quarter of its journey round the dial when the click of the door was heard, and Paul stood face to face with George White, *alias* Gresham. for, to be frank with you, Dr. Ward's conjecture was quite right, and the man whom the world worshipped nowadays as a millionaire was the self-same person who had sought out the struggling young doctor fifteen years before, and driven him to Clapham to see his wife.

Their eyes met. Paul strove hard not to let the loathing and aversion he felt shine forth in his; one glance told him Mr. White was not in the least surprised at his visit. The next puzzled him; he had expected to see anger,

confusion, and fear; he was met with an urbane smile and outstretched hand.

"Ha! Beresford! back again from the north? I should say you were not sorry. Scotland must be uncommonly cold in such weather as we have had lately."

Marcus Ward's warning rang in Paul's ears; he made a desperate effort to control his feelings, and succeeded. He spoke as composedly as possible.

"I was very glad to get back to London. A man in my position naturally would be; but a great disappointment awaited me when I found Ivy was not in Coningsby-street, and the man in charge there actually told me he had not your address."

"No, he has not got it. You see all people who really know me can come here, and I don't want a host of strangers to invade my little seaside sanctum."

"But Dudley must have been under some mistake; he actually said you had left orders I was not to know where you taken Miss Carew."

"I was obliged to."

"But why?"

"My dear fellow, Miss Carew is a minor, and under my sister's care; her guardians cabled to me that you had a wife already living, and they wished her kept carefully from your society."

"Mr. White, you could not have believed such a cruel slander?"

"I never believed it for a moment; they said Mrs. Beresford had been to see them, and gave me her address. I went across to a man who has lots of dealings with the Colonies, and borrowed a directory of New South Wales; sure enough the name, Mona Beresford, was entered under the address given."

"But she is not my wife."

"Granted! I for one could never doubt your word; but Ivy has taken the matter up warmly. As an heiress it seems she has always been haunted by the dread of being married for her money, and she jumped to the conclusion you had proposed to her for her fortune. We had a terrible scene, and finally she insisted on being taken away from Coningsby-street."

"And where is she?"

"My good fellow, you place me very awkwardly. Sir John orders me to stop all communication between you and Miss Carew. The young lady herself declares she will not see you. How can I do anything but obey their joint wishes, and keep my temporary ward away from London?"

Paul felt the man was lying to him; but, oh! how difficult it was to detect him, and bring his guilt home. The story was so plausible, so complete in all its details.

"I suppose Mrs. Austin is with Ivy?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Then, Mr. White, if you will give me their address I will pledge my word to call at the house but once, and should Ivy refuse to receive me I will return at once to town. You surely cannot refuse me now!"

The millionaire looked thoughtful.

"Certainly that alters the case; but you are imposing hard conditions on yourself, and I tell you frankly I believe Miss Carew will refuse to see you. She is not well; she has lost both tone and spirits lately; in fact, she has taken this matter very seriously to heart."

"Only give me her address! I promise should she refuse to see me I will not molest her with further visits, but return at once to London."

He loved Ivy so well, trusted her so completely, that he felt it was impossible she would refuse to see him, and at least listen to his defence.

"I consent," said George White, at length;

"but I must add yet one more condition."

"And that is?"

"That my sister knows of your coming, so that she may prepare Ivy for the shock. Mr. Beresford, I cannot waive this point. Miss

Carew is not strong, and has been ordered to avoid all excitement."

"May I see the telegram you send?"

"You shall write it yourself. Come into my den."

He gave Paul a chair, and from a drawer took a telegram form, which he handed to Beresford.

Paul's suspicions were totally disarmed. He might have been alarmed at any telegram sent by Mr. White; but since he was allowed to word it himself he decided there could be no sinister design in it. And this was the message:—

"Paul Beresford, Strand, to Mrs. Austin.— Shall be with you this evening. Please prepare Ivy for seeing me. I can explain all."

Mr. White put the message in an envelope. Paul began to fancy he had wronged him, for he never glanced at its contents before he rang for John Dudley.

"Take this across the road, and send it off to Mrs. Austin."

Then as the boy left the room,—

"There is no train till one o'clock, Mr. Beresford—perhaps you would like to catch that?"

It was then much over eleven; the discussion had taken over an hour.

"I should," said Paul, promptly, "if you will give me the address."

"I hope you don't think I am going to cheat you out of it? Here it is," and he handed Paul a card, perhaps left at the office to assist Dudley's memory—"Myrtle Cottage, Hollington, Hastings."

Paul seemed to walk on air as he left Mr. White's office. The interview had gone better than he had dared to hope for. He dashed off a hasty note to inform Dr. Ward of his success, partook of a modest lunch, and reached Charing Cross in ample time for the one o'clock train.

Disappointment awaited him. That special train ran on "Saturdays only." In reply to Paul's remonstrances the booking-office clerk showed him a foot-note in the time-table drawing the attention of would-be passengers to the fact, and then added, by way of consolation, that another train, a slow one, started in two hours.

So it was fully six o'clock when our hero reached Hastings, and well on towards seven when his fly stopped at Myrtle Cottage. It was a pretty little white house, with garden in front, and just the kind of place to please anyone not in very strong health.

Paul rang at the bell, and inquired for Mrs. Austin.

The neat handmaiden started.

Did the gentleman not know Mrs. Austin and Miss Carew left by the midday train? She thought for London?

Paul's heart seemed to stand still, his very lips grew white.

"Do you know if they had a telegram before they left?"

"Yes, sir. It was that telegram made them resolve to go. I was in the back drawing room, and the door stood ajar, so I couldn't help hearing the telegram was for Mrs. Austin; but I can't help thinking it was about the young lady too, for I heard her say, 'Take me away! take me away!'"

"And they would have remained here but for the telegram?"

"Why, yes, sir. They had taken the rooms for a month, and hadn't been here a week. Mrs. Austin acted quite the lady; she paid missis the full rent for the whole time, and gave me half-a-sovereign."

Paul gave her another.

"I wish you could tell me where they have gone?"

"To London, sir. All the luggage was labelled for Charing Cross. They had very few boxes for such ladies. But then, they were just the nicest people. Mrs. Austin, so free and liberal, and Miss Carew just as sweet and gentle as though she knew she hadn't long to live."

Paul's heart ached.

"Not long to live!"

"Well, sir, of course. I'd not say so to her face, but that was what everyone thought who couldn't look at Miss Carew without feeling she was fading away."

Pleasant news this for the man who held her dearer far than his own life. Paul had come down to Hastings feeling the victory was won, and Ivy as good as saved. He went back to London with the conviction that somehow or other George White had played him false, and that day's work would but increase his darling's peril.

## CHAPTER XL

THE time of a girl's engagement is said to be the happiest of her life. I have heard this statement made over and over again, and yet I venture to dissent from it, and to affirm that, save in exceptional cases, it is far from being a period of perfect bliss.

In a long engagement lasting years, entered into with all possible hope and trust, with love on both sides, as the time wears on it is almost impossible that the girl should not know some of the pangs of hope deferred, should not feel sometimes dragged two ways between the conflicting claims of family and fiancé—the family jealous of her superior love for a stranger, the fiancé unable to see her relations with his eyes.

There must in such a case be many a pang for the girl herself, specially if as time goes on her lover is not able to fix the day. How such a girl would dread the visits of distant relations with their would-be kind inquiry of "anything settled yet?"

How she would shrink from the weddings of friends and schoolfellows where some well-meaning busybody would be sure to ask, "And when will it be your turn, my dear?"

No; decidedly and emphatically! If an engagement lasts for years it cannot be an entirely happy period; and, on the other hand, a short betrothal has its trials.

To be continually hunted away to try on this or that, to have to spend one's days in a whirl of shopping, excitement and visits, leaves little time for that intimate knowledge of each other, which is the mainspring of happiness.

It had seemed to Ivy Carew that hers was an exceptionally bright destiny. She loved Paul with all the strength and fervour of her heart; but it was such bliss to realise she had found her hero, and that he loved her back again, that she was in no haste to change the name of fiancée for that of wife, and no plan could have been more welcome to her than the spending a few months in London, seeing her lover often, and learning to know him better before she gave herself for all time to his keeping.

Sir John's Australian project was the first blow to her day dreams. She dreaded the idea of living with strangers, and a nameless sense of ill oppressed her; but when she had actually taken up her abode in Coningsby-street the extreme kindness of host and hostess did much to reassure her, and Ivy would have been quite happy but for Paul's sudden summons to Edinburgh, which deprived her of all chance of his society.

It was a real sorrow to her, specially that she had not bidden him farewell; besides, Ivy had been brought up in a wealthy home. She knew that so soon as they were married Paul Beresford would never need to enter the Society's office again, and it seemed to her hard that, for her sake, he should not have refused to undertake the journey to Edinburgh.

"My dear girl," said Mrs. Austin, when the young heiress half hinted at this, "he could not help himself. While he remains at the 'Security' he must obey the orders of his superiors."

Ivy flushed up. The phrase was an unhappy one, and jarred upon her.

"Come," said the widow, kindly; "really you have no reason to fret; just think how soon you will have the monopoly of his society entirely. Really, Ivy, you should rouse yourself. It is not wise to let any man see you can't do without him."

Ivy's pride came to the rescue. She went about as usual, and tried to believe a few days would bring Paul back to her; but as the days grew into weeks, and there was no word of his return, she became sad and troubled.

Mr. Cleghorn came to dine in Coningsby-street by special invitation. He was introduced to Miss Carew, but not informed of her engagement to his employer; so (unless the millionaire had given him a private hint) he had no idea how interested Ivy was when he turned the conversation on his branch office at Edinburgh.

"Young Beresford will do well there," said the great man, suavely. "It seems a little hard on him to be exiled so suddenly, and I said as much last time I wrote; but he answered he was perfectly contented, found Edinburgh society enchanting, and had not the least desire to come south."

It was a deliberate lie, uttered at the request of his host; but how was poor Ivy to guess that? Disparagement of her lover from Mrs. Austin or George White she might have doubted; but when a stranger gave his testimony unsolicited what could she do but believe?

She wrote a piteous little letter to him a few days before Christmas, begging him at least to spend the festival with her. Mrs. Austin obligingly undertook to post that note, and it never left Coningsby-street.

Ivy marvelled Paul never mentioned her appeal when he wrote to say how impossible it would be for him to leave Edinburgh. Hurt and wounded in her tenderest feelings, Ivy Carew answered him briefly, sadly.

From that time there was no pleasure in their correspondence. Her letters became brief chronicles of facts; of her love for him, of their reunion, she said nothing. And then quite suddenly her health began to fail; it was so gradual, that Ivy could not have told when she began to feel ill only, when January was halfway through, she began to realize there was something amiss. Her limbs shook under her, she was white and thin, her appetite had deserted her, and she felt a strange dislike for any exertion.

Mrs. Austin declared she was fretting, taxed her with it to her face; Ivy indignantly denied the charge, and then proved its truth by bursting into a flood of passionate tears.

"My dear child!" said the widow, "this will never do! I shall not be able to look Sir John and Lady Portescue in the face if I have to give you up such a poor little white ghost as you look now. Why, they would think we had been starving you."

"You have been all kindness."

Mrs. Austin hesitated.

"You know I have been young myself once, and I understand what is troubling you. You fancy Mr. Beresford is neglecting you, and you are fretting about it."

"I do want to see him so badly!" and the tears glistened in her eyes.

"Write and tell him so."

"I couldn't."

"My dear child, there would be no harm in it; he is your own property now, and you have a right to him."

"I couldn't ask him to come if he does not care to."

"Then I shall ask him myself!"

"Mrs. Austin!"

"Don't be afraid. I won't put a word that can compromise your dignity. You need not appear to know I have written, and I won't send the letter if you disapprove of it."

But when Ivy read the note she liked it very much. It said just enough, and not too much: "Ivy had not been well; she seemed to miss her uncle and aunt a good deal. Could not Mr. Beresford desert luxuries for a few



days, and come down south to brighten her up?"

"He is sure to come after that," decided Mrs. Austin, as she directed the note.

"And when do you think?"

"He would come the end of the week, because it would give him Sunday here. This is Tuesday; I think you may fairly expect him on Friday."

"And you think he will come?"

"My dear girl, he must come. If he's any regard for you, he can't stay away while you are ill."

"And he has a regard for you."

"He quite worships you, that's my opinion. And though his conduct may have seemed a trifle strange lately, I shall never believe but what he's a model of constancy."

Ivy's eyes filled. How her lover's apathy was trying her no words could say. Poor young couple! they were helpless, and at the mercy of as cruel a fiend as ever walked in human form.

Every one of Paul's letters were opened cleverly by means of steam, and perused in the privacy of Mrs. Austin's dressing-room; and only about one in three ever passed beyond that dressing-room; the widow taking good care that the warmer and more impassioned letters went into the fire, while the shorter ones in which lurked a shade of coldness for what the writer deemed his love's neglect, were carefully refastened and sent to Miss Carew's room.

Ivy looked almost her own self when Mrs. Austin's note to Paul had been sent to the post (it never reached it, but how was she to know that, poor child). There was a sparkle in her eyes, and a bright colour on her cheeks. She looked more like the Ivy who had been the sunshine of Lady Fortescue's life than the pale, listless girl whom all Coningsby-street had decided was very ill.

But, alas! for human expectations. The very morning after Mrs. Austin had written her letter, as Ivy was getting her head into a state of confusion over Bradshaw, and trying to decide how soon she might expect her lover, a telegram was brought in for her hostess. Mrs. Austin read it in perfect silence, then she cast a pitying glance on Ivy.

"My poor child!"

"Oh! what is it? Don't keep me in suspense, dear Mrs. Austin. Do tell me what has happened?"

"Can you bear it?"

"I can bear anything but suspense."

The widow placed the telegram in her hands; it was from Paul Beresford, and had been handed in at the Edinburgh office that morning:—

"Quite impossible; get I—to use a little common sense, and see how unreasonable it is to expect me to desert my employers' interest for a mere caprice."

Ivy stretched out her hand—it had grown so thin lately that Paul's ring would hardly stay on her finger—and threw the telegram into the fire.

"Don't speak to me," she implored, as Mrs. Austin began some attempt at consolation. "I will go to my own room if you don't mind. I can't bear to talk now. I want to think it all out."

Many another girl would have written and broken off her engagement. Ivy waited. For one thing she had not been supposed to know of Mrs. Austin's request, so she could hardly punish Paul for refusing it. She determined to wait until she saw him, only from that day her confidence in him, her hopes of happiness, fled. Little wonder her letters grew few and sad; little wonder she made no allusions to their future meeting; her very heart seemed breaking with its misery, and yet the girl's nature was so innately noble that she could not bring herself to reproach her lover.

"When I see him will be time enough," she decided. "I think when he sees the change in me he will be sorry, and I will set him free at once."

Mr. White and his sister held many con-

sultations together in those days, and Ivy little guessed her share in them.

"Nothing could have succeeded better," said the widow. "I declare George if you fail, it will be entirely your own fault."

He wiped the beads of perspiration off his forehead.

"I shall be glad when it is all over. I don't like the business, Jenny."

"You did not like the business fifteen years ago, but I don't think the memory of it has troubled you much since."

He shuddered.

"That's all you know."

"Of course if you prefer poverty, if you would like to go back to the old days of scheming and plotting again—a bare existence—I have nothing to say."

"No," and his voice was more determined, showing the momentary vacillation was over. "I can't do that it's no use regretting things now, for it is too late to go back."

"Then you had better push on."

It was February when this conversation took place, only a day or two before Paul Beresford escaped from his Scottish exile.

"Plenty of time."

Mrs. Austin shook her head.

"The Fortescues have been a fortnight in Australia already."

"Their business might take months."

"It might. On the contrary, a few days might end it. I shall not feel safe after the first of April."

"Nonsense."

"That would give them three weeks in Sydney. Sir John is not the man to care to stay long, and his wife will pine to get back to Ivy, so that you have only two months you can rely on, George."

"Lullington suspects nothing."

"Nothing in the world; for blindness commend me to a fashionable physician."

"Or a neophyte."

She shook her head.

"No. That man from Pimlico was no fool. He had his suspicions, but we were too quick for him."

"Poor devil! He was half-starved."

"I wonder what became of him!"

"Died years ago most likely. He went to the East, and no doubt caught some of the diseases rife there."

"Well, it's no use thinking of him; what we have to remember is not the past, but the future. You had better show Ivy that cable-gram."

"She won't believe it."

"A month ago she would have laughed it to scorn; I think she will be more reasonable now. My surveillance of the correspondence has had admirable results."

The next scene of the vile plot may be imagined. Ivy's guardian went to her with the bogus cablegram in his hand. He explained to her that Mr. Beresford's wife was alive and in Australia; she had presented herself to Sir John, and the Baronet sent a peremptory order that his niece was to hold no further intercourse with her quondam lover.

The way Ivy received the news astonished him. She made no angry denial, no eager protestations. She seemed to be reviewing something in her mind; then she clasped her white hands together, and murmured, tremulously,—

"Thank Heaven!"

"My dear girl," said George White, seriously alarmed, and beginning to think she had lost her senses, "what can you mean?"

"This explains everything."

"It explains that Beresford is a villain. I really don't see what else it explains."

"He is not a villain!" said Ivy, faintly.

"Don't you see the truth? It is as clear as possible."

He shook his head, and so she went on,—

"I would stake my life on Paul Beresford's honour. I am positive that unless he loved me he would never have asked me to be his

wife. His eagerness then, and his coldness now, were a contrast I could not understand. Now I know the truth."

"It is more than I do."

She smiled half-sadly.

"I always felt there was a secret in his past. He never said so; but again and again his words implied it. Of course, that secret was his marriage."

"And his intention to commit bigamy," interposed George White.

"Hush! I believe he thought his wife dead; I believe the last time he came here he was still under the mistake. Since then some strange chance has revealed to him she is alive. He shrank from telling me, so he tried what coldness and neglect would do to estrange my affection. He stayed away from me, he left my letters unanswered, and all to save me from the truth. He preferred I should deem him false, careless, a fortune-hunter even, to giving me the shock of knowing the true barrier between us."

"You are a most extraordinary girl."

"Perhaps. I am thankful to see this," and she touched the cablegram. "Now, at least, I can understand his conduct; now, at least, I may go on honouring him in my heart as a king amongst men."

"My dear Ivy," and even George White's voice had a ring of pity in it, "you are too romantic for this prosaic workaday world."

"Perhaps."

"And you would actually see this living 'king among men,' and assure him how intensely you approve his conduct?"

The sarcasm was quite lost upon Ivy Carew.

"No," she said, slowly; "I will never willingly see him again, it would be too painful for us both; but I will write to him, and assure him I, for one, shall never judge him harshly."

Very soon after that the Coningsby-street establishment was broken up, and Mrs. Austin took her beautiful young charge to Hollington; but even in the few days she was at Myrtle Cottage Ivy grew rapidly worse, and the pretty handmaid had told Paul Beresford the simple truth when she said that only to look at Miss Carew you knew she was "fading away."

Paul suspected Mr. White of playing him false, but it so happened that in this particular instance no deceit had been employed. Believing implicitly in the existence of her lover's wife; feeling he sought the interview only to assure her of what she already believed (his own faith in Mrs. Beresford's death when he proposed for Sir John's niece), Ivy was as anxious to hide herself from Paul as Mrs. Austin could possibly be to hide her.

"I can't refuse Beresford the address if he demands it," George White had said in a kind, fatherly way to Ivy the Sunday before. "Wouldn't it be better for you to see him once, and have done with it?"

She shook her head.

"I couldn't; it would kill me!"

"Then I'll send you a telegram if he's coming, and you and my sister had better leave Hollington. Don't tell me where you go to for a few days; that will be the best plan."

So Mrs. Austin had not the slightest difficulty in persuading Ivy to leave Myrtle Cottage; instead, the girl was feverishly anxious to be off, and as they had very little luggage the maid completed the packing briskly, and Ivy had plenty of time, after a dainty lunch, to drive to Hastings and catch the one-thirty train from London.

There were very few passengers. As a rule, the people who leave the seaside on a Monday are of the class who like to travel very early or very late, to get home in ample time to see after their domestic matters, or to enjoy their short stay by the said sea to the utmost limit; therefore the one-thirty train was seldom much patronized on Mondays, and this particular afternoon there were not half-a-dozen people waiting for it besides Mrs. Austin and her charge.

The widow and Ivy travelled first-class, of course; the maid and the stray parcels were in a second-class carriage close by. Ivy leant back in a corner, half-hoping someone would come in and put a stop to Mrs. Austin's attempts at conversation, which she found most trying, when, just as the train was moving, the door was thrown open, and a young man was almost bundled in by the guard.

He looked about twenty, or less, had a fresh, pleasant face, a complexion rather too delicate for health, while with his heavy greatcoat, silk muffler, and generally taken-care-of appearance, gave the impression he was sojourning at Hastings for his health.

It was in part true; Ronald Thorne came from a consumptive family. His childhood had been spent in the East, and there was quite sufficient delicacy about him to make his guardians very careful where he spent his winters. A public school education had been out of the question, but perhaps that had not been altogether a disadvantage, for frequent travels, much mixing in English and foreign society, and the careful training of a very intelligent tutor, had combined to give the young man a delightful lack of self-consciousness, good powers of conversation, an immense amount of *savoir faire*, while, on the other hand, he had nothing of effeminacy or conceit about him. He was now spending six months at Hastings—one of half-a-dozen pupils received by an experienced coach. Very soon he was to go to Oxford, where he would probably take as good a place as though he had been brought up on the usual plans.

He looked delighted at catching the train; and yet, if it had only been known, he had been at the station more than an hour, and so had not the slightest excuse for missing it. He felt like a person on the brink of an adventure, and so far from being a clandestine one, it was undertaken at the express request of his guardian. Mr. Roland Thorne had the utmost right to be in good spirits.

Sad and tired as she was, Ivy could not help noticing the brightness of his face, and for the first time it struck her as a little hard that women should have come to the full burden of life's sorrows at an age when their brothers are mere boys. This stranger was probably her senior, and yet he was as much a boy as an urchin of twelve, while she had a heart well-nigh broken.

Mr. Thorne watched her furtively; saw that her smelling-bottle had the monogram I. C. engraved on its silver top, and noticed that she addressed her companion as Mrs. Austin.

"It's all right," muttered this precious youth to himself. "I've done the business as neatly as possible. I shall deserve a putty medal and a vote of thanks, that I shall," and then he turned up his coat-collar, pulled his hat over his eyes, curled himself up, and appeared to sleep.

"Ivy," said Mrs. Austin, in a low tone, when they had passed Red Hill and were rapidly approaching town, "where shall we go?"

Ivy started.

"I don't mind."

"My dear you must have some choice. I should drive at once to an hotel, but that Mr. Beresford would easily trace us through the cabman."

"He won't try."

"I think he will."

"Send Mary and the boxes to an hotel, then we can walk about and lose ourselves."

"But, my dear, we must sleep somewhere!"

"Yes. Well then, leave Mary and the luggage at Coningsby-street, and when we have settled on something she can come and find us."

"But it will be dark before six, child."

"We shall be in town by four. Surely we can find something in two hours?"

Mr. Thorne dozed on.

"How that boy sleeps!" said Mrs. Austin.

I wonder if he is ill?"

"Oh, no, just tired!" said Ivy, quietly. "See, here we are at Charing-cross; just speak to Mary, and come away."

Mr. Thorne rubbed his eyes, and alighted. He watched Mrs. Austin give some directions to a pretty maid, and then saw her and Ivy get into a cab, and tell the man to drive to the Crystal Palace Bazaar.

Mrs. Austin and her young friend partook of tea and cakes at that pleasant resort, and never noticed their late travelling companion going in extensively for ham sandwiches and coffee at another table.

Nor did they perceive that when they walked slowly away from the Oxford-street exit the tall boy in his thick great-coat and muffler followed them at a discreet distance.

"No end of fun," said Mr. Thorne, to himself; "but the idea of a fellow being set to do such a thing by his guardian. And she's awfully pretty, too. I wonder what it all means?"

Mr. Thorne was a good walker; but he did not have to put his powers much to the test, since after a very short distance Mrs. Austin took a cab.

Of course Master Ronald took another, and strangely enough both vehicles stopped before the Grosvenor Hotel, and both Ronald and Austin engaged rooms there.

But with a difference. The lady retained three bedrooms and a private sitting-room, giving her orders with the air of one accustomed to command, and requesting that a messenger should at once be sent to the Charing-cross Station for her maid and her luggage, and another to summon Dr. Lulling-ton early the next day.

As for Ronald he quietly told the waiter he wanted a bed for the night, and should most likely be leaving the next day. Then he ordered a snug little dinner, and sat down to thoroughly enjoy it.

"He told me to ask old Foxy for five pounds, and to spare no expense," reflected the young gentleman; "and I fancy I've carried out his injunctions to the letter. My, didn't old Foxy stare! I believe he thought I'd forged the telegram. Well, I shall just keep my ears open, and I'll go round to Harley-street to-morrow morning. No need to trouble them to-night; besides, I should like to go to the play."

And he did go to the play, and enjoyed himself very much, and the first news which greeted him in the morning (only he had to make discreet inquiries to obtain it) was that Miss Carew had been taken dangerously ill, and Dr. Lullington was then with her.

Ronald hurried to Harley-street after this, put aside the astute man-servant, who declared his master was engaged, and walked straight into Marcus Ward's presence.

"I knew patients didn't come so early," he said, promptly; "besides, I was sure you'd want to see me, so I wouldn't let that Thomas gammon me. My! what's the matter?"

For he had suddenly perceived his guardian was not alone; but that a gentleman sat opposite, who seemed to have despair and misery stamped on every line of his face.

(To be continued.)

THE following singular treatment was formerly applied in Dutch workhouses to indolent and apathetic individuals: The patient was placed in a sort of large tub, into which water was kept constantly flowing through a pipe, so that in order to keep himself from drowning he had to turn a crank which pumped the water out again. The water supply and the hours of working were nicely adjusted to his strength and endurance, and the amount gradually increased every day. In one report it says: "The inactive limbs are soon brought to the required degree of suppleness; and the men very soon begin to ask for some less irksome labour, which they after wards perform in a most satisfactory manner."

## A PROMISE OF SPRING.

—C—

THERE'S a promise of Spring in the air,  
Too subtle a thing to define—  
It has come, it has gone, but 'twas there—  
It quickened the pulses like wine.

In the night, with the warm southern rains  
The snowdrifts have melted away,  
And the frozen streams, breaking their chains,  
Go racing and laughing all day.

Soon the crocus in splendour will glow,  
The daffodil bloom by the brook,  
And the May-flower, nestling so low,  
Glance shyly up out of its nook.

While against the bare woodlands all grey,  
Or down by the banks of some stream,  
Like a wash of faint green, far away,  
The budding young willows will seem.

Yes, the dark, dreary winter has fled;  
The young birds are seen on the wing—  
Let the dead past go bury its dead—  
We'll live for the beautiful spring!

H. W. J.

## A GOLDEN DESTINY.

—30—

### CHAPTER VII.

MARJORIE WYNNDHAM was not the kind of girl to put off doing a thing because it happened to be disagreeable and the very next day she and her father set off for London, determined to seek a personal interview with the solicitors, and learn as much as they could of this new claimant to the estates.

Never as long as she lived would Marjorie forget that journey, or the heart-sickness that was her companion. It was a dull, grey, depressing sort of morning, with low clouds overhead that threatened rain, and as they neared the metropolis the atmosphere grew denser.

Paddington is not at the best of times a particularly cheerful-looking station, but in this cold grey mist, with its noise and bustle and confusion, its hurrying porters, and bewildered passengers, and long suffering guards, it seemed a veritable pandemonium. "Oh!" sighed Marjorie, as she alighted from the carriage, and looked around her. "If this is London I much prefer the country."

Her father smiled, in spite of his anxiety.

"You must not form your judgment from *this*," he observed, hailing a hansom as he spoke, "and remember, too, you are looking at everything through blue spectacles to-day."

They drove at once to Chancery-lane, where they got down in front of the office of Messrs. Graves and Whitman, and were soon ushered into the presence of the senior partner of the firm, a large, bald-headed man, with gold-rimmed glasses and fat white hands, of which he was apparently extremely proud, for he took every opportunity of waving them. And emphasising his words by gestures with his dimpled forefinger.

"This is a great pleasure my dear sir, a great pleasure if you will allow me to say so, notwithstanding the painful nature of the circumstances that have brought you to town," he observed, unctiously, as he shook father and daughter by the hand, and begged them to be seated. "It is some years since we last met."

"Yes," said the Squire, impatiently; "and I am anxious to come to the point that has brought me here without delay. Of course you understand that my business has to do with the new claimant for Wyndham Abbey."

"Yes, a sad affair, very sad, indeed," responded Mr. Graves, shaking his head.



"But I am not going to give up hope in such a hurry!" exclaimed the Squire, hotly, half rising in his excitement. "For aught I know this *sei-diant* Geoffrey Wyndham may be the rankest impostor that ever tried to make good a fictitious claim!"

"Certainly he might be, but in this case I am afraid he is not."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because the documents he produces are evidently genuine, and go far to prove him the person he pretends to be. I have copies of them here." Mr. Graves reached forward a packet of papers tied up with red tape. "And when you have seen them, I fear you, too, will think your case hopeless."

He untied the packet, and handed the documents one by one to the Squire. The latter's hand trembled so violently that he was unable to hold them, and Marjorie stole quietly to his side, and held them for him, looking at them herself the while.

The first was a certificate of marriage between Geoffrey Wyndham, formerly of Wyndham-place, W—shire, England, and Antoinette Marsh, spinster, of Melbourne, Australia. The next was a certificate of the birth of their son, Geoffrey, and then followed certificates of the deaths of the parents.

"The claimant has also in his possession various letters written to his father by relatives in England, amongst others by yourself," said the lawyer. "I recognised the writing at once, although of course, I said nothing to that effect."

"Then," said the Squire, whose lips had grown white with despair; "you yourself entertain no doubt that I shall have to resign the estates?"

"I am afraid that is my opinion."

"But I have been in possession so long," urged the poor Squire, "and I have always been told that possession is nine points of the law."

Mr. Graves smiled rather contemptuously.

"Possession will not help you in a point like the present, sir. Indeed, there is only one circumstance favourable to your view of the case."

"And that?" said Marjorie, bending forward with eager intentness.

"The great dislike Mr. Wyndham—for so he calls himself—has to go to law. It is true his solicitors have filed a bill in Chancery, but he himself would much rather have the matter settled by arbitration. Of course he believes that there can be no doubt as to the result."

"What do you suggest I should do?" asked the Squire, inclined, in his hopelessness, to rely on another opinion than his own.

Mr. Graves pondered a few minutes.

"I should suggest an interview with the claimant. Make an appointment to meet him here—say to-morrow—and after you have spoken together you will be in a better position to judge what line of conduct to adopt."

This idea commended itself to Squire Wyndham, but his impatience would not brook the delay of nearly twenty-four hours.

"I will go and see him now—at once!" he exclaimed, rising in his eagerness. "I suppose you can give me his address?"

"Yes—but—"

"There are no 'buts.' I will see the man immediately, and put an end to my suspense!"

"My dear sir!" remonstrated the lawyer, rising too, and spreading out his hands. "I fear your impetuosity may hurry you into a course of action you will afterwards regret. Of course you must do exactly as you like, but I should certainly advise your waiting until to-morrow, and having the interview in my presence."

But the Squire was not to be persuaded, and Mr. Graves, seeing that further remonstrance would be useless, gave him the address, and then escorted father and daughter downstairs, when they got into a cab, and were driven off in the direction of Regent's Park.

The cab pulled up in front of a somewhat

pretentious-looking house, and, on inquiry, they found "Mr. Wyndham" was at home, and were at once ushered upstairs into a sitting-room, very much redolent of tobacco.

Here, seated in an armchair, reading the newspaper, was a man of about thirty, or perhaps a little more. It was a task of some difficulty to guess his age, for years of dissipation had left traces on his face that at first inclined one to think him considerably older than he really was. In his youth he must have been extremely handsome, and even now might have been called so by many people.

As he rose to greet his visitors, he displayed a figure slightly above the middle size, and well and strongly built.

"Sir," said the Squire, laying down one of his cards on the table, "you will see by this who I am, and doubtless you will be at no loss to guess my errand."

The young man glanced at the card and bowed, flashing at the same rapid glance of admiration at Marjorie.

"I am glad you have come, sir," he said, motioning them to be seated, "for if it is possible I would much rather have to do with you without the intervention of lawyers, a rascally set of men, whose only object is to plunder us both."

"We need not discuss that question," said the Squire, with a tinge of hauteur. "Let us confine ourselves to the business that has brought us here this afternoon, if you please."

"Certainly, of course it is in regard to my claim on the Wyndham estates?"

The Squire assented by an inclination of the head, and the younger man took a seat opposite him, and near to Marjorie.

"My claim is a just one," he said, impressively, "and I am in a position to prove it, as the solicitors have no doubt already informed you. Look at me yourself, and confess that I am like the Wyndhams."

He threw himself back in his chair while his visitor obeyed the command, and looked at him intently.

"Well?" he said, interrogatively.

"You are dark, have brown eyes and hair, like my family, but otherwise I detect no resemblance," returned the Squire; but even as he spoke he asked himself whether he was telling the truth.

There is nothing in the world easier than to fancy one can trace a likeness whose existence has been pointed out to us; the very expectation creates the result.

The man who called himself Geoffrey Wyndham laughed.

"There are none so blind as those who won't see," he quoted lightly. "Excuse me if that sounds rude, but it fits the occasion most aptly. So you refuse to recognise me as your cousin?"

"I did not say so," exclaimed the Squire, hastily. "I want to do what is right, but I must guard myself from being deceived by an impostor."

"Certainly. I quite agree with you, for it is a very hard matter to give up land and fortune, and Wyndham Abbey is a big bait. However, I will show you some of your own letters to my father, and then perhaps you will be less sceptical."

He took a memorandum-book from his pocket, which seemed to be full of papers. From these he selected two, and held them so that the Squire might obtain a view of their contents, without however, relaxing his own grasp upon them.

"Too valuable to entrust into other hands," he observed, with a cunning smile. "What do you say to these, sir?"

"There can be no doubt that these are genuine. No one could imitate my writing so perfectly!"

"So far, so good. I have other documents equally—nay, more valuable, and I am quite sure when you have seen them you will acknowledge you have not a leg to stand on. Every law court in England would support my claim, for it is good in law, as well as

justice—two things which don't invariably go together. I am quite ready to confess that it is hard lines for you to give up the estate after holding it so many years; I should cut up rough myself if I were in your place; but the world's a see-saw, you know—one up and the other down. You have been up for a good while, and now it's my turn."

He spoke with a certain airy, philosophical assurance that went a good way in persuading the Squire that he was not an impostor—a way that strongly reminded him of his uncle Geoffrey.

Yes; there could be no doubt that this was Geoffrey's son, and henceforth Wyndham Abbey must know him as master. The poor old Squire's head drooped on his breast, and a sigh broke from his lips that, if he had been a woman, would have been a sob.

"Come, come, don't give way like this!" pursued Geoffrey, not without a rough sort of kindness. "Things may not be so bad for you after all. I'm not a downright brute to want you to give up everything, and perhaps we may make some kind of compromise between ourselves, and independently of those infernal lawyers."

"What compromise can we make? what do you mean?"

Geoffrey's eyes were fixed on Marjorie, who blushed a vivid crimson under the admiring intentness of his gaze, and drew a little farther back, with an involuntary shrinking which did not escape him.

"I can hardly tell yet; your question is not one to be answered on the impulse of the moment," he said to the Squire. "But I have a suggestion to make, which I fancy may chime in with your views."

"Name it."

"I propose coming to Wyndham Abbey on a visit to you, and when I am there we can think and talk the matter over, and decide on a final arrangement. You must introduce me to your friends under my proper name, and as a relative of your own, but it will not be necessary to specify the degree of relationship, or to tell people that I lay claim to the Abbey. What do you say to the plan?"

The Squire pondered for a few minutes. He was not suspicious by nature, but years and experience had taught him a certain amount of caution, and he can hardly be blamed for wondering whether this fair speaking concealed some ulterior design.

"I should have no objection to the plan if I were sure you were honest in proposing it!" he observed, bluntly.

Geoffrey laughed with apparent amusement at the candour of the reply.

"I assure you I have no object, save the one I have already stated," he answered. "Indeed, a few moments' reflection must convince you of the absurdity of your suspicions, if you will remember that I am absolutely certain of proving my claim; and when that is done I can take possession of the Abbey, and dispossess you of every rood of land belonging to it. But I do not forget that you are a relative, and, moreover, that your position is a very hard one. I wish to treat you with consideration if you will allow me to do so; if not," he shrugged his shoulders, and made a little movement with his hands, looking very un-English as he did so.

The Squire was touched, and held out his hand in an impulse of remorse.

"Forgive me if I have misjudged you, but I am really so thoroughly upset by this trouble that I am unlike myself. I accept your proposals, and invite you to the Abbey on a visit for as long as you like."

Marjorie bit her lip to keep back the words of caution that were nearly breaking forth. Personally, she did not approve of the line of conduct adopted by her father, for it seemed to her that if the *sei-diant* Geoffrey once got a position at the Abbey it would be an utter impossibility to dislodge him; and, besides, a compromise did not commend itself to her. In her proud, young independence of spirit she would have preferred leaving her

home, without deigning to accept a favour at the interloper's hands.

Perhaps the young man guessed something of what was passing in her mind, for as soon as the Squire ceased speaking he turned to her.

"May I hope, Miss Wyndham, that you will ratify your father's invitation?"

"Anyone whom my father invites to Wyndham Abbey must be welcomed by me," she said, but stiffly and coldly enough.

An odd gleam came in his eyes, but he only bowed, and then his visitors took leave.

When he found himself alone, he stood for some minutes leaning on the back of a chair, his eyes fixed on the floor, while a slow smile curved his lips under his heavy moustache.

"Tis better to do things by fair means than foul," he muttered, half aloud, "and I shall certainly lose nothing by being generous to the old man. Perhaps I may win the daughter's gratitude, and that will be a great point. How lovely she is! One's ideal of a pure, sweet, English girl! I am tired of foreign beauties, with their dark hair and languishing glances, and I think if I could win a good woman's love I might become a very respectable member of society. Well, stranger things have happened, and perhaps—"

He broke off his soliloquy at this point, and lighted a cigar.

## CHAPTER VIII.

LORD ST. CROIX gave a slight, involuntary start as the door of the Dower House was opened, for he found himself confronted by one of the queerest specimens of humanity upon whom he had ever set eyes—a little, bent old woman, with a dark, square, swarthy face, much more like a man's than one of the fairer sex—a likeness that was increased by a more than incipient beard and moustache.

She must have been nearer seventy than sixty, but her frame was still very powerful, and altogether she might have passed for one of the witches of mediæval ages, whose office it was to guard this dismal old house.

"Well!" she exclaimed gruffly, after a moment's pause, during which she had been steadily regarding him, "what may you want, pray?"

"I have come to look over the house if you will be good enough to show it me."

"Humph! I have other things to do, than satisfy idle people's curiosity," was the surly retort, whereat Lord St. Croix felt inclined to laugh.

"My good woman, I am quite willing to compensate you for your loss of time, and, what is more to the point, I have Sir Trivice Leigh's permission to view the house. Here is his card."

He tendered it as he spoke, but the operation of looking at it involved a great deal of fuss and ceremony on the part of the housekeeper, who slowly drew forth a case from her pocket, and then proceeded to ornament her nose with a huge pair of horn-rimmed spectacles.

"One would think you had a beautiful young princess imprisoned inside, from your reluctance to admit me," observed the young man, jocosely.

She looked at him with severe rebuke.

"That's what I call talking rubbish, and I say it, though you are a lord."

"Who told you I was a lord?" he asked, quickly. "I said nothing about my title."

She seemed rather taken aback by the slip she had evidently made, and, having no answer ready, held the door open for him to enter, closing it directly he was inside.

The hall was large and lofty, but traces of damp and neglect were visible on all sides, and the cold, wet chill, peculiar to houses that have been for some time uninhabited, struck St. Croix the moment he found himself inside.

"I don't know what you want to see, whether it is any particular room or the whole house,"

observed Mrs. Sumner; "most of the furniture and all the pictures have been taken away, so there is nothing worth looking at except, maybe, the rats, that will run away when they see you."

"I want to see the whole of the house, but I need not trouble you to come with me, for I know my way about pretty well. This is not the first time I have been here, although it may possibly be the last."

But the old woman had not the slightest intention of being summarily dismissed, and followed him with impatient silence as he made a tour of the house. As she said, all the pictures and articles of value had been removed, but there was still a good deal of furniture in the rooms, albeit most of it was old and worm-eaten and the upholstery bore evident traces of moth.

Although he did not stay long in each apartment, St. Croix kept his eyes pretty well employed, on the look-out for traces of occupancy, other than that of Mrs. Sumner. He could hardly have said he expected to find them, in spite of his conviction that there had been a woman in the Tower the preceding evening.

Presently, struck by a sudden idea, he came to a pause, and took from his pocket a sovereign, which he held up before the old woman, whose eyes immediately gave out a dull sparkle of avarice.

"Do you see this?" said St. Croix. "Well, it shall be yours, on condition that you answer a few questions."

"What are the questions?"

"First of all; who is in this house besides yourself?"

She flashed a quick glance of inquiry and suspicion at him, but her answer came without hesitation,—

"No one."

"You live here alone?"

"Quite alone."

"And have done so for some time?"

"A matter of ten years, or more."

"Do you ever have any visitors?"

"Yea. Sometimes my daughter—she is Mrs. Seymour's maid, you know—comes to see me, and sometimes Mrs. Seymour herself."

"Did your daughter come to see you yesterday?"

The housekeeper shook her head. Unlike most old women she was not given to gossip, and even made her replies as short as possible.

"Your daughter does not sing, I suppose?"

Mrs. Sumner laughed gruffly.

"Her sing! I should like to hear her attempt it. No, she don't sing, but maybe you have heard the Lady of the Tower singing, and that is why you are asking me all these questions."

She peered cunningly into his face as she spoke, and St. Croix drew back with a slight movement of disgust. She was actually repulsive in her withered, and wicked old ugliness.

"Ah! I thought so," she chuckled, as if his gesture confirmed her idea; "and you're like a good many other people, think it is a human being that sits at the window, and sings across the lake. But you are wrong, for it is no creature of flesh and blood, but a spirit as can't rest in her grave."

St. Croix abruptly gave her the sovereign, and turned away, going towards a door which he remembered was opened by a spring in this very room.

The room was panelled in oak, and the door had been so artfully contrived that it was almost impossible to discern it in the wall. The Viscount, however, had been shown it when he visited the Dower House in his boyhood, and it was one of those sort of things that do not easily escape the memory, so that he found the spring without any difficulty, and on pressing it, the door slid smoothly on one side—so smoothly indeed, that the young man fancied the hinges must have been lately oiled.

"Ah!" he said, stepping inside the opening

thus revealed. "This would make a capital hiding place if one wanted to conceal oneself."

The room he entered was smaller, and contained more furniture than the other. The fireplace looked cleaner, and on a side table stood a glass filled with fresh flowers. St. Croix went towards them, and bent down for the purpose of smelling them, lifting the glass up as he did so, and awkwardly upsetting the flowers, which fell to the ground.

As he picked them up he noticed they were tied together by half-a-dozen strands of fine, silky golden hair, and the incident, slight as it was, confirmed him in the impression that Mrs. Sumner was deceiving him in alleging herself to be the only occupant of the house.

"What fine roses!" he observed, aloud. "Did you gather them, Mrs. Sumner?"

"Of course I did—out of the garden."

"And placed them in water?"

"Yes."

Something on the floor attracted the visitor's attention—a little ball of loose silk, such as is occasionally used in embroidery. It may seem a small thing for him to attach any importance to, but St. Croix had so much of a detective's mind as to be aware that nothing is too trivial to form a link in a chain of circumstantial evidence.

He picked it up, and examined it closely.

"You seem to have a curious sort of inquisitiveness, my lord," remarked Mrs. Sumner, grimly. "I use that silk in my work sometimes, but if your mind is set on it you can have it, and welcome."

"I was only going to beg these roses, and to use the silk for tying them together more securely," he responded, quietly, and as he spoke he unwound the silk from the piece of paper which formed the centre of the ball.

It was true he had another object when he picked it up, but this he saw no necessity for divulging to Mrs. Sumner, and it was for the purpose of diverting her suspicions that he made the flowers an excuse. As it happened, however, the incident was not without a tangible result, for when the silk was unwound, the piece of paper proved to be a scrap of an envelope, and the first words that caught Lord St. Croix's eyes were the name of the girl whom he had met so strangely—Irene Duval!

It was as much as he could do to prevent an exclamation of surprise from escaping his lips, but he managed to check it in time, and went towards the window, which looked out on the mere. Then he became aware that this must have been the room from which the singing had come the previous night.

Close up to the window an arm-chair was drawn—the only one the room possessed, indeed, and in this lay a cushion, which St. Croix, with a distinct purpose in view, examined. He was not much surprised to find on it two or three golden baits, of the same colour and texture as those round the roses.

"There!" exclaimed Mrs. Sumner, impatient under the long delay. "Surely you have seen all you want to see now!"

"Not quite," replied the young man, "but I won't detain you any longer, as I perceive you are rather in a hurry."

The fact was he wished to be alone and to think over the discovery he had made; and it was clear to him that, supposing his ideas were true, and there was some girl in the house, precautions had been taken either by the housekeeper or Mrs. Seymour—or perhaps both—which would certainly prevent his seeing her.

He breathed a sigh of relief as he got outside, and free from the clammy dampness of the atmosphere of the Dower House.

"Phew!" he whistled, lifting his hat from his brow, and letting the fresh air brush across his temples. "I don't wonder the Dower House has been deserted so long; few women, dowagers or otherwise, could live in such an unhealthy place. I suppose that old witch of a housekeeper has become inticed to it, for she looks tough enough to stand anything."



Not till he got to his own room at Woodleigh Court did he examine the strands of hair he had put so carefully away in his pocket-book. Of course they told him nothing; but, all the same, they seemed to confirm his idea of an unexplained presence in the Dower House, which, for some reason or other it was desired to keep secret.

Then he took out the scrap of paper, round which the silk had been wound, and spread it out on the table before him. It had evidently been torn from an envelope, and still retained the postmark of Brussels. Its address was intact so far as the name was concerned, although part of the prefix "Mademoiselle" was missing.

"What did it mean? What could bring it there?" St. Croix asked himself, almost inclined to believe that the interest he had taken in the girl, whose locket was still in his possession, had rendered him the victim of an hallucination.

But no; there was the envelope before him, and the date of the postmark was but a few months ago. If accident had brought it to Dower House, then surely a stranger coincidence never happened than that the Viscount should find it!

The more he thought of it the stranger it appeared, and the keener became his desire to penetrate the mystery. Instinct warned him against asking Mrs. Seymour and telling her the result of his mission, for he felt it was one in which she would take little or no interest; indeed, he was not sure whether the lady herself had not a share in the secret, whatever it might be, and if so, her reluctance to his entering the house would be fully explained.

More than once Harold chided himself for entertaining the idea that Irene Duval's place of concealment was discovered; but, fact in the shape of the torn envelope, assured him that there was some basis for such a belief, far fetched and romantic, as at first sight, it might appear.

He was very silent all that evening, and in answer to Mrs. Seymour's inquiries as to what he had discovered at the Dower House, told her that Mrs. Sumner had frightened him away before he had had time to prosecute his search to the end.

She laughed and seemed amused. "Betty Sumner is certainly rather an awful looking person," she said, lightly, "but she is thoroughly trustworthy, and it is for that reason Sir Trévise installed her as caretaker."

"It was nothing of the kind, but simply to please you," retorted the Baronet, who overheard the remark. "Personally, I think Mrs. Sumner the most disagreeable old creature I have ever had the bad fortune to come across."

"A perfect old fend!" supplemented Ernestode, brushing her white shoulders, and glancing across at her uncle's handsome Secretary, who was looking over a batch of freshly arrived magazines. "But the fact is, mamma is so devoted to her maid that she is delighted to have an opportunity of doing something for her."

"My maid is very devoted to me, and I like to show I am not ungrateful," quietly responded Mrs. Seymour, and after that the subject was dropped by tacit consent, and Ernestode moved to the piano, whither St. Croix, as in duty bound, followed her.

It is not very wonderful that he should not have been able to sleep that night, for the events of the day had excited him, and the constantly recurring thought of Irene filled his mind to the exclusion of all other.

He was glad when dawn broke, and soon after the sun had risen he was out-of-doors, sauntering aimlessly along the grounds, and at last taking the path that led to the mere, more by instinct than any conscious volition. It was still quite early, not yet five o'clock, and the dew-drops were glistening like diamonds on the hedges, and blades of grass.

Except for the songs of the birds a complete

silence reigned, and when he reached the plantation, St. Croix stood still to listen to the exquisite melody of the thrush which was trilling in a bush close by.

Suddenly he started, for he heard the splash of cars in the water, and filled with curiosity he rapidly reached the shore of the mere, where he stood for a few seconds concealed from view by the trunk of a tree.

In the middle of the lake was the skiff, and seated in it a young girl, as fair and fresh as the morning itself, a young girl with eyes as blue as the sky, and hair that might have been woven strands of sunlight.

It was Irene Duval!

## CHAPTER IX.

There came rather hard for Marjorie Wyndham just then, and if she had not possessed one of the brightest, sweetest, least selfish dispositions in the world, she would have become despondent and miserable. As it was, however, she kept on telling herself that better days were in store; and besides that it was her duty to appear happy, whether she was or not, in order to prevent her father from growing melancholy.

She still kept the secret of her love, for she knew it would grieve the Squire to think she had chosen for her future husband a young man who had neither name nor fortune to recommend him, and at the present juncture it was her object to keep from him all unpleasant things.

Contrary to her command, Roy Fraser had written to her, to say that he would not leave England without seeing her, and begging her to meet him in the wood one evening in the week, in order that they might say good-bye.

Poor Marjorie hated the idea of a secret appointment, but cunning Roy had put no address on his letter, so she could not write and say she would not keep the rendezvous, and it would have been too heartless to keep him waiting there all the evening!

This being the case, the young girl had no alternative but to go; and it would be useless to deny that the prospect of seeing her lover made the blood thrill through her veins in joyous anticipation, and brought hot blushes to the cheeks, that had of late been more like the lily than the rose.

The morning before she was to meet Roy Geoffrey Wyndham arrived, and it was easy to see the impression made upon him by the fine old Abbey, and its magnificent interior.

He spent the afternoon wandering about the grounds, but at five o'clock made his appearance in Marjorie's sitting-room, where the young girl was sitting in front of a dainty silver tea equipage.

"May I come in, Miss Wyndham?" he said, pausing on the threshold of the French window, and removing his hat. "Your father told me I should find you here, and also hinted that you would give me a cup of tea."

"Certainly," assented Marjorie, trying her best to infuse into her manner a warmth she was far from feeling. "Are you fond of tea?" she added, as she poured it out, and handed it to him.

"Well, not particularly—that is to say, I never used to be, but then I never had the opportunity of taking it from such fair hands before, and that makes a considerable deal of difference you see!"

"I am afraid you are rather given to passing compliments, Mr.—a—Wyndham," said Marjorie, pronouncing the name with something of a gulp; "and as you are going to stay here some time, it will perhaps put matters on a better foundation if I tell you at once that I don't like them."

"All ladies say that."

"Do they?"

"But they don't mean it," went on Geoffrey, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Well, then, in that particular I beg to be an exception, for I do mean it!"

"All right, Miss Marjorie, I'll try and remember, and if ever I transgress you must put it down to—"

"Habit?" interposed the girl, mischievously.

"I was not going to say that; however, it can stand so, if you like. I should wish you to believe that I would not willingly do anything that could offend you. I want to be—friends."

Marjorie did not reply, but took up some embroidery that was lying on the table, and suddenly became very busy.

"You know we are cousins," he added, as if in excuse for his last words.

She looked at him steadily.

"I don't know that. Although I call you 'Mr. Wyndham' that does not mean I acknowledge you to be any relative."

"You are cautious, Miss Marjorie. I command you for it, but in this instance the caution is misplaced. If your father is satisfied with my proofs you certainly ought to be. However, we will talk on some other subject, shall we?"

He changed the conversation with consummate tact; and soon, prejudiced as Marjorie was, she was forced to confess that he was really rather an interesting person. He had travelled over America and Australia, and his remarks showed him to be a shrewd observer both of men and things. His descriptions of scenery, of strange trees, and gorgeous flowers, and wonderful tropical birds, with rainbow-lined plumage, made Marjorie lay down her work, and listen with absorbed attention; and when, half an hour later, the Squire came in, he looked somewhat surprised at finding the two engaged in such an apparently interesting little talk.

Marjorie—rather ashamed of thus going over to the enemy—got up, and left the room, saying something about dressing for dinner, and Geoffrey watched her intently until she had disappeared.

"I congratulate you upon your daughter, Squire," he observed, as the door closed. "She is a very charming girl!"

"She is better than that—a good girl!" rejoined the old man, emphatically.

"And beautiful as well!"

"I don't know so much about being beautiful. Now, if you could have seen her mother—"

"I suppose she has plenty of admirers," put in Geoffrey, who had no desire to hear the charms of Marjorie's mother dilated upon.

"Admirers! No, certainly not!" was the prompt response. "She is much too sensible to go gadding about after sweethearts."

"Still, you know, sweethearts will come, whether or no. Then I may take it that Miss Marjorie is not engaged?"

"Decidedly you may."

"And has no lover, to the best of your belief?"

"I should like to see the lover!" exclaimed the Squire, explosively, and grasping his stick as he spoke. "He had better let me catch him—that's all!"

"But Miss Marjorie will have to be married some time."

This was a proposition the Squire could not deny, so he remained silent.

"Now listen to me, air," said Geoffrey, glancing round to make sure they were alone, and there was no chance of eavesdroppers. "When you were at my rooms, and asked me what was the nature of the compromise I would accept with regard to the estates, I put you off with generalities, though the fact was I had even then a distinct purpose in view, for the first moment I set eyes on your daughter I fell in love with her."

"What!" interrupted the Squire, falling back a few paces, and staring at his guest as if he thought him mad.

"I fell in love with your daughter," repeated Geoffrey, coolly, "and I resolved, if possible, to win her for my wife. Doubtless you think the idea hasty and roman-



"I FELL IN LOVE WITH YOUR DAUGHTER," REPEATED GEOFFREY, COOLLY, "AND I RESOLVED, IF POSSIBLE, TO WIN HER."

tic, but if you will consider it you will see that it is one calculated to smooth all difficulties. What I propose to do is this—win Marjorie's love, and when I make her my wife execute a deed, by which I allow you to retain possession of the Abbey, and all its revenues during your life, on condition that you give me a yearly allowance of five thousand pounds. What do you think of the plan?"

For a few minutes the Squire could say nothing, for the cool audacity with which the proposal was made absolutely took away his breath, but those few minutes brought with them reflection, and at the end of the pause he neither ordered the speaker out of the house nor poured forth a torrent of indignation as he first of all felt inclined to do.

"You have taken me by surprise, Mr. Geoffrey"—for in this way did he escape the unpleasantness of calling his guest "Wyndham"—"and I hardly know how to answer you. Of course I shall put no force on Marjorie's inclinations, so the decision rests more with her than with me."

"Certainly; but I wanted to make sure of your consent before I set about my love-making."

"You have known her such a little while," pursued the Squire, "that she would feel insulted if you were to let her even guess your intentions. She is a proud girl—my Marjorie."

"And I don't blame her for it. I like proud girls—the prouder the better, so that they don't show off their pride on me. I am not such a duffer as to show my cards before I have won the trick, and you may trust my prudence to do nothing calculated to make Marjorie afraid of me. I should not have mentioned the subject so soon to you but for two things—the first, that I wanted to make sure she had no other lover, and the second, that I wished you to know my real motive for coming down here to visit you, as I saw you were not quite satisfied with the explanation

I gave you in town. By the way, what does that bell mean?" he asked, as one rang.

"It is the dressing-bell. The second that you hear will be for dinner."

"Then our interview had better end, or, rather, let us say it shall be adjourned. I am glad we have come to a full understanding with each other, and I shall look to you to do all in your power to further my courtship."

Saying which he left the room, while the Squire stayed behind, half bewildered at what had just taken place, and not quite sure whether he had been right in giving even a tacit consent to Geoffrey's proposal.

Still, on consideration, he was bound to confess that such a settlement of the difficulty would be the most satisfactory that could be adopted, for then he would retain possession of the Abbey, and Marjorie need never leave her old home, or him.

Truth to tell, he had rather feared her marriage whenever he had thought of it, for would it not mean separation from him? Whereas, by espousing Geoffrey, she would still retain her family name, and the estate would descend to her children.

The more the Squire thought of it the more he liked the idea; thus it will be seen that no lingering doubt as to the genuineness of Geoffrey's claim remained.

"He is not a bad sort of fellow, after all," he soliloquised, "and he is handsome enough to take any girl's fancy. I daresay he would make a decent husband. True, he is a good deal older than she, but it is a fault on the right side, for his experience of the world will help him to guard her from its cares and anxieties. Altogether, I think it would really be the best thing that could happen for both of us."

Having come to which conclusion, the Squire hurried upstairs to don his dress clothes.

Geoffrey Wyndham was very favourably impressed with the Abbey and its belongings; and certainly the very good dinner he ate, and

the excellent wines he drank, did much towards deepening the impression.

The dinner-table, with its silver ewerglases, its hothouse flowers, its flashing crystal and cut glass made a pretty picture; and Marjorie, seated at the head of the table, dressed in a quaint plush gown, and with a bunch of tea-roses at her bosom, looked as charming a *chatelaine* as you need wish to have.

Altogether, Mr. Geoffrey Wyndham decided that his lines had fallen in very pleasant places.

(To be continued.)

A CHARMING CARLYLE LETTER.—Among the newly-published Carlyle letters is this altogether delightful note from him, in his twenty-sixth year to his sister of eleven; "Dear little Jane,—Thou never wrotest me any kind of letter, yet I would be glad to see one from thy hand. There is in that little body of thine as much wisdom as ever inhabited so small a space; beside, thou art a true character, steel to the back, never told a lie, never flinched from telling truth; and for all these things I love thee, my little Jane, and wish thee many blithe new years, from the bottom of my heart. Does the little creature ever make any rhymes now? Can she write any? Is she at any school? Has she read the book we sent her? Tell me all this—if thou hast power even to form strokes—that is, to go through the first elements of writing. I am living here in a great monster of a place, with towers and steeples, and grand houses all in rows, and coaches and cars and men and women by thousands—all very grand; but I never forget the good people at Mainhill—not thee, among the least in stature, though not the least in worth. Write then, if thou canst. I am very tired, but always thy affectionate brother,—TH. CARLYLE.—Give my compliments to Nimble, that worthiest of curs. Is Jamie Aitken with you still? I reckon him to be a worthy bry."





["AH! HERE ARE THE TRUANTS!" COUSIN MAUDE EXCLAIMS, AS WE RE-ENTER THE ROOM.]

NOVELETTE.]

## TWO DREAMS.

—O—

It is a brilliant moonlight night in May. I am standing alone at one of the open windows in the spacious and handsome drawing-room at my cousin Maude's in Belgravia (for my father has at length been prevailed upon by Lady Merton to allow me to taste, for a brief spell, all the delights of a London season).

I am standing with my lace-trimmed silken skirts flowing around me, and with the scent of the handsome bouquet I hold in one hand stealing up to me, as the gentle evening breeze stirs faintly the scented petals.

And the moonlight floods the whole scene, and I do not know why, but it makes me think of Elmsleigh—my father's parish; and then I remember Clifford Ralston, the young doctor, to whom I am engaged, and whom I love passionately, and wonder what he would think of me could he but see me now, arrayed in my charming pink, lace-trimmed, silken robes.

"I wish he could see me," I tell myself, with a little pardonable vanity, for the long *châle* glass in my room had reflected a very pretty, flushed face, and a charming *petite* figure as I had passed before it several times that evening before descending to my cousin Maude's presence. She is so severe respecting one's appearance, and she has determined—she tells me—that I shall make an early conquest of some one of the aristocratic men who attend her receptions, balls, and so forth.

And I had listened to her ambitious views for myself, and laughed softly and secretly as I remember Clifford, my own true love, whom I had left in dear Elmsleigh, and from whom I am hoping to receive a letter by the next post.

"I wonder what Clifford is doing now? I wonder if he is thinking of me?" I continue.

"Why, Maude, whom are you addressing?" breaks in my cousin Maude's voice, and then her hand is laid on mine as she continues,—

"Come away from the open window, Madge, at once. The nights are still chilly, and I must not allow you to run the risk of taking cold now, just when Sir Ralph is expected to-night; and you know what he thinks of my little country cousin's singing!"

And the clear tones are followed by a well-satisfied laugh, as my cousin draws one of my hands within hers, and turns to lead me away.

But at that instant a breeze springs up, and the fresh air stealing in, wafts the scent of the fragrant flowers lying at my feet, and bears it upwards.

"Madge, take care! Do you not see you have dropped your flowers? What would Sir Ralph say if he were to arrive at this moment, and find his flowers so neglected!"

"I am very sorry, cousin Maude. I had quite forgotten them, I believe. Poor things, they are not much hurt, though!" I return, laughingly, as I stoop and pick up the bouquet I had dropped in my fit of abstraction when dwelling upon my absent lover.

"Madge, I can't understand you!" exclaims my cousin, as she follows me across the room, and seats herself by my side on one of the satin-lined couches.

"In what particular respect, Cousin Maude?" I laughingly ask.

"Why you are so perfectly indifferent to Sir Ralph Darrel's attentions, while most girls of your age would be nearly wild with pride and delight, to think that they had secured the best part of the season."

"But I have not yet secured him Cousin Maude," I reply mischievously.

"Not quite yet, certainly, Madge, but the chance is yours as much as though the actual words had been spoken. And it will be so nice for us both, Madge, dear! Sir Ralph's country-seat in Midlandshire is a splendid place, and I shall be so glad to join you there for a little spell of quiet and repose; for really, Madge I

find a season now quite tiring enough. It was so different when dear Lord Merton was alive. He managed so many things for me, but now I am quite alone."

As my cousin concludes, she draws forth her delicate lace handkerchief, and wipes carefully and cautiously her fine eyes.

I am spared a reply to this speech, which I deem rather premature, considering Sir Ralph Darrel has never spoken a word to me, that all the world might not hear.

But then of course, I argue, I am young, and having been so country-bred, what can I possibly know of the manner in which such as Sir Ralph and his aristocratic and town-seasoned colleagues conduct their wooing of the fair Belgravian maidens.

Again, Clifford and I are so unsophisticated and rusticated, evidently; for we—

But why describe the embracings, or repeat the sweet phrases that we employ? They are sacred to us!

To return.

I am sorely puzzled how to reply when the door opens, Sir Ralph himself is announced, by the tall footman in crimson-plush. Cousin Maude is so addicted to bright and showy colours, and is herself this evening resplendent in old gold and crimson.

It is her reception-evening, and Sir Ralph has hardly paid his homage to his handsome hostess ere others are announced.

The room fills fast, and I am soon the centre of a smiling, and admiring group, but Sir Ralph always contrives to place himself at my side.

Cousin Maude's fine eyes fairly blaze with triumph and delight, as she notes his presence in such continual proximity to myself, as she from time to time passes in and out among her guests.

"The conservatory has but few occupants, Madge," she murmurs once.

Simple enough words, but I think I understand their meaning.

A crimson flush of annoyance and shame

floods my face for an instant, and then—I remember Clifford!

And the hot and hasty anger dies away, as I recollect that I have brought all this upon myself by not telling my cousin of my engagement to Clifford Ralston.

But then I would rather bear anything than see her scornful looks! I am so young and inexperienced!

"You find the room too warm, Miss Arden?"

"I believe I do, Sir Ralph," I reply.

"I know of a delightfully cool spot if you will allow me to conduct you there?" my companion continues.

"I shall be very grateful, Sir Ralph," I return.

Placing my gloved hand within his arm I let him lead me to an open window, and from thence to a seat on the covered balcony.

"How deliciously fresh and cool!" I exclaim, Sir Ralph! "I am almost forgetting myself among the low shrubs."

"I am glad Miss Arden approves of the change," Sir Ralph replies, gravely.

And then, glancing up at the fine, tall figure of my escort, as he leans against the iron balustrade of the balcony, and noting the expression on his face, I am conscious of what I had done in thus allowing him to lead me away from the crowded rooms.

What shall I answer him when he— But he is speaking, even while I am ruminating as to a suitable reply!

"Miss Arden, I cannot be sufficiently grateful to you for thus giving me the opportunity for which I have sought in vain for the past week."

I glance up at the face bent towards me, and read in the dark eyes what is to follow.

"Oh, Sir Ralph!" I exclaim, hastily, and letting his flowers (which I still hold) fall again to the floor, "I have been very wrong! I know it now! But I did not think!"

"Your flowers, Miss Arden," he replies, stooping low to pick them up as he speaks.

I bow and receive the same; but I shiver perceptibly as I do so.

"Miss Arden," continues my companion, "I should not have dared to take you away from the others had it not been for this," touching with one hand the fair white gloves resting on my lap.

I am silent; for I feel how wrongly I had acted.

"But I must speak now, Miss Arden, and tell you how I have admired you from the first moment that I met you—now nearly six months ago! Dear Miss Arden! will you not give me some hope that you will accept me some day as your husband?"

My husband! Did I hear the words aright? I, who am already the affianced bride of another! But it is all my own doing that this man now stands before me declaring his love for me. All my own fault!

"Miss Arden, I trust I have not offended you?"

What must I reply? Shall I tell him the whole truth? I am nearly puzzled. But my companion's next words aided me a little.

"Don't give me an answer now if you do not wish to do so. I can wait awhile your decision. Only tell me that I have not offended you, Miss Arden, by speaking of my admiration—my love for you!"

There is such humility in the tone—in the manner—that it stings me to the quick to think how I have deceived this man! And yet I had told myself that he couldn't care for me, as cousin Maude declares, because he spoke in soft words. I am inexperienced, truly, and he is a man of from forty-five to fifty.

"Offended, Sir Ralph! How can I be, when it is all—"

And then I hesitate and flush deeply.

"Thank you, Miss Madge. I will not press you for an answer now, but will give you time for reflection. Should you like to join the others again, Miss Madge? I shall get accolded

if I monopolize thus the belle of Lady Merton's rooms!"

I simply bowed, and, rising, took the proffered arm in silence.

Just as my companion draws aside the curtain at the entrance to the gay and crowded rooms, I almost whispered, as I looked up pleadingly into my escort's face: "Please do not let Cousin Maude know!"

"Miss Arden can trust me in all things," comes the low-spoken reply, as his dark eyes return my pleading look.

"Oh, here are the truants!" Cousin Maude exclaims, as we enter the room.

"I feared a scolding, Lady Merton," says Sir Ralph, glancing mean-while at me.

"Shall I scold Sir Ralph, Madge?" whispers my cousin to me, and there is such a meaning look in her fine eyes, that I felt inclined to reply in the strain.

"Not Sir Ralph, Cousin Maude. I deserve the scolding, if either; for I wished to quit these hot rooms for a time, and Sir Ralph was good enough to bear me company."

"And now you must pay the forfeit for your long absence, and favour my guests with a song. Sir Ralph, you would like some music?"

"Lady Merton already knows how passionately I am attached to music; and Miss Arden has so many times heard me express my admiration of her charming voice."

"You will spoil my little cousin with flattery, Sir Ralph!" laughingly exclaims Cousin Maude, as she accompanies Sir Ralph and myself to the grand piano at the further end of the inner drawing-room.

I sing repeatedly; song after song—Clifford's favourites included;—sing till cousin Maude persists that I shall be asked for no more that evening.

And so the hours speed by, fraught with many a triumph for Cousin Maude, and much admiration and attention for myself.

But none of the brilliant throng would recognise the smiling and charming Madge Arden in the poor tear-stained faced girl crouching at the side of the pretty French bed later on!

For now the excitement is fairly over I realise fully what I have done; and tears and bitter repentance, mingled with longings for home and Clifford, burst from my full and burdened heart!

"Only a few more days, and I shall once again see my dear father and Clifford!" I murmur, as I at length seek my pillow, and dream confused and mixed dreams of Sir Ralph Darrel and my lover—Clifford Ralston.

"Very glad, indeed, to see my little Madge at home once more!" exclaims my father for the twentieth time, as he regards me across the small tea-table with his dear, tender eyes.

"And I am more than glad to be at home again," I respond warmly.

"But my little Madge enjoyed her visit?" questions my father, anxiously.

"Very, very much, dear father!"

"Ah! I do not expect there were many who failed to recognise what a charming little creature Lady Merton's cousin is!" exclaims my father, fondly.

"Now, father dear! no flattery, if you please, sir. I have had quite enough of that commodity lately, and I am getting quite tired of, and surfeited with it."

Then suddenly changing my tone I ask,—  
"And Clifford, father? Tell me again why he was not at the station to meet me. I scarcely heard his excuse just now: I was so taken up with you, dear father."

"Clifford was very disappointed and vexed not to be here to join his welcome with mine; but, unfortunately, he was sent for to a distant farm-house to attend a case, and so could not be present, but he hopes to look in upon his return to— But here he comes! I am going out to visit poor old granny Stokes; she is failing fast."

My father leaves the house as Clifford enters it.

And then—

Oh! the delight at once again finding my dear one's arms around me, and to have his kisses showered upon my lips!

"Oh! Clifford, Clifford!" I almost sob, "I am so glad to be with you again."

"And I have so longed for your return, Madge!" comes the answer in earnest, passionate tones.

Then I glance shyly up at my lover, and am struck anew with his handsome face and fine figure. Of course I have always considered him handsome, but now his good looks seem to be enhanced, as I mentally contrast him with Sir Ralph Darrel and others whom I have left behind me in aristocratic Belgrave.

"What is it, Madge?" Clifford asks presently; as, thinking my own thoughts, I still continue absently to gaze at my lover's face. I lower my eyes then and blush.

"Tell me, Madge!" he pleads, bending down to kiss my hair.

"I cannot realise before how good-looking you are, Clifford!" I whisper forth.

"Oh! Madge, Madge, you have learnt the art of flattery, then, from your town-bred acquaintances?" laughingly returns my lover. Then adds, "I want you to come out with me to our favourite seat in the orchard, and then I must hear all particulars respecting this wonderful visit. Will you come, Madge?"

Before he has fairly concluded his request I spring away to fetch a hat and wrap.

A few minutes later and we are treading the small gravel-path which leads to the orchard.

"How sweet the roses are!" I exclaim, as side by side we pass the small rosary (my dear father's hobby), and the fragrance of the crimson, pink, and white petals is wafted to us by the gentle evening breeze.

The sun is just setting in the western horizon, and leaving in his wake gorgeous streaks of crimson and gold.

"You do not get such roses as these in London, I expect?" replies Clifford.

"I have had no roses this summer," I said. "Then let me bear the blame of plucking one of Mr. Arden's especial 'beauties'!"

So saying, Clifford bends forward and gathers a lovely deep-hearted crimson bud from a neighbouring bush.

"What a beauty!" I exclaim. "And how I shall treasure it; it being the first I have received this season; and also because it was given me by you!"

"Keep it, darling, till our wedding-day, and then I will replace it by others fresher and fairer!" whispers my lover, as he holds open the wicket-gate leading into the orchard. On through the long grass beneath the trees, whose green fruit was just beginning to show amid the leaves. We stroll on and on till the spot is reached. Here is the "patriarch" of the orchard; an old, gnarled and hoary trunk, with branches bent and twisted, so as to form a species of bower.

"Now for a nice quiet talk, Madge!" Clifford exclaims, as we seat ourselves, side by side, on the bent branch.

For all reply, I lean back against the hoary trunk, and sigh—a sigh of perfect content and happiness. For oh! it is so grand to be once at dear old Elmsleigh; to be once again in the presence of my dear love!

"What a sigh, Madge! For which of your late admirers is that intended?"

"Clifford!" I surprised and indignant tones; but a blush suffuses my face as I remember Sir Ralph Darrel.

"My darling, I was only jesting. But I want you to tell me that you still love me as much as ever? I have never doubted you, Madge, for one single moment; not even though your letters have been few and far between, but—"

"Oh! Clifford, I meant to have written so much oftener; but cousin Maude—"



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"Never mind that now, darling. I am not going to find fault with my dear little Madge, only I should like to hear once again from her lips that she still loves me," Clifford continues, as he draws me still nearer him.

"Clifford, I do love you—and more than ever if that is possible," I reply, in low, earnest tones, glancing up, meanwhile, into my dear one's face. "Are you satisfied now, Clifford?" I ask presently, after an interval of silence, during which Clifford has looked fixedly down the green and leafy perspective. Still no reply.

"Clifford, what is it?" I question anxiously.

"My darling! I was thinking over a dream I have had lately. Nay, do not laugh, Madge," he breaks off to add, noting the smile breaking over my face. "Do not laugh, please. For oh! it seemed so real—so terribly real—that I had so longed to hear from your lips that you really and truly love me still. Will you repeat your words once again, dear one?"

I glance in surprise at my lover's face, but as I look I repeat my words,—

"Clifford, I do love you—and more, if that is possible!"

"Thank Heaven! it is only a dream!" issues from his lips, and he breathes a sigh of relief at the same instant.

"What was your dream, Clifford?"

"It is not worth relating now, my darling," he replies.

"But I do so want to know, Clifford!" I plead.

"And I so want to know how my darling has enjoyed her visit, and what she has seen and done during the time," retorts my lover. The words are lightly spoken, but the manner is firm.

And so I press my questioning no further, but complying with his wish, I answer brightly and cheerfully,—

"Oh! cousin Maude was so kind to me, and took me everywhere with her. That is why you got so few letters from me, because there seemed something for every hour—nay, every moment—of the day; and then, after dinner, we always attended balls, concerts, receptions or routs. I never enjoyed myself so much in all my life before! But throughout it all, Clifford, I wished you had been with me."

"To have one more admirer of you as you appeared in your sweet dresses, eh, Madge?" my lover laughingly asks.

"How can you, sir?" I snap. "Of course I missed you terribly!"

"I know you did, Madge. And now one more kiss from your dear lips, and then I will take you back to the house!"

One more longed, passionate embrace, and then together Clifford and I retrace our steps through dewy grass, and 'neath the star-bespangled sky, through the wicket-gate, and up the gravel path, and at length the hall door is reached.

"You will come in, Clifford?" I ask, as I turn the handle and open the door.

"Not to-night, Madge. My mother will be expecting me. I promised her I would not be late."

"I have been so selfish, Clifford. I have never once enquired for your mother!"

"I will excuse you to her, dear, since I have so engrossed your attention," Clifford laughingly replies. Then continues: "My mother sent her kindest love, and she will be so glad to see you when you can find time to call. She is very anxious to hear of your doings among the gay set you have been visiting in Belgravia."

"Please give her my love, Clifford; and I will certainly come and see her as soon as possible!"

"Thank you, Madge. Now one more sweet good-night, and then we must part for the present."

"Good-night! dear, dear Clifford!" I answer, standing on tip-toe to kiss my dear one's handsome face!

One fond and lingering embrace, and then we part. I listen to his firm tread till it dies away in the distance; then I turn away indoors, and the hall-door closes upon me.

"I will write to cousin Maude to-morrow!" I tell myself, as I walk along towards the quaint old church.

It is a lovely June morning, and I do not hurry myself, even though the bell is giving notice by its slower and more fitful tones that it will soon stop; and the service will commence.

My father is already in the small vestry putting on his white robes, for I can see the same fluttering in the summer breeze through the partially opened door.

Still I do not hurry; the spell of a perfect summer morn is on me, and I feel it is good to be sauntering slowly along in the sweet, pure sunshine.

But the bell ceases presently, and then I reflect how much averse my father is to my being late, so I quicken my steps, and am soon within the cool church-porch.

One moment to readjust and pull the ribbon which has gone fluttering astray, and then my hand is on the latch.

"Allow me," says a voice close by, while a hand, cased in delicate and well-fitting gloves, is stretched forth from behind me.

I drop my fingers, the door opens, and without turning my head, but merely bowing in recognition of the service rendered me, I pass on through the door, and, with heightened colour and downcast look, take my seat in the vicarage pew.

As I do so I become conscious that the owner of the delicate kid-gloved hand is being ushered by the old clerk into the Ellertons' pew.

(Colonel Ellerton is the lord of the manor, and is looked up to with considerable awe and reverence by all my father's parishioners.)

"Some friend of the Colonel's," I tell myself as I catch just one glimpse of the bowed head as I rise from my knees, and prepare to join in the singing of the first psalm.

And then my thoughts wander; and for the time, forgetful of everything, I give full compass to my voice, and as I do so, I unconsciously glance in the direction of the Ellertons' pew.

One glance—and then, with crimsoning face, I broke off abruptly and suddenly in the refrain, and drop my eyes quickly upon my prayer-book, for the form standing so upright in old Colonel Ellerton's pew is the form of Sir Ralph Darrel! And he has recognized me and I him! And Clifford is sitting with his mother not many seats back, and he must have seen the exchanged glances. Quick as lightning these thoughts flash across my brain.

Still more and more crimson becomes my face, as I wonder how I shall explain all satisfactorily to my two lovers!

How can I confess to the one that I have acted wrongly in allowing him to suppose for an instant that my decision might be in his favour, when all the time I was the promised bride of the other?

Ah, me! Why did I not openly confess to cousin Maude my secret, and thus have secured freedom from the attention of others?—of such attentions as Sir Ralph Darrel showered upon me upon every possible occasion!

But all this time, while I am indulging in such perplexing thoughts, the service is proceeding, and finally we rise from our knees to sing the hymn before the sermon.

And then there is a slight rustle from behind, a faint and subdued murmur of voices, followed by steps going down the aisle in the direction of the church door.

I turn my head just in time to see one of my father's oldest parishioners being carried out, and Clifford following in the wake of the bearers.

For a few seconds everyone's attention is taken up by this sudden illness of poor old Farmer Hobbs, and then the door closes upon

the small procession, and, quiet being once again established, we proceed with the singing of the hymn.

Will my father's sermon never come to an end?

I ask myself this repeatedly, as I sit alone in the vicarage pew with continually changing countenance, and think of the ordeal awaiting me. If only I can meet him when Clifford is not present; and then, perhaps, he need never know aught of the affair! For, honourable man as I believe him to be, I feel sure he will disappear from my path as soon as he has heard the truth from my lips. And I would, oh, so much! that the truth could be told before Clifford's suspicions are awakened!

"Thirdly, my dear brethren," my father remarks in his clear tones—but how slow are the tones! I can bear it no longer.

Rising hastily, I gather up my sunshade, and retrace my steps down the aisle, regardless of the astonished faces surging around me. On till the door is reached, then through it, and out into the summer air once more.

"If only Sir Ralph were here, I would tell him all before—"

"Miss Arden! Can I render you any assistance?"

Even before I have well finished my mental wish, Sir Ralph is at my side, with anxious face and extended arm.

"Thank you, Sir Ralph!" I murmur, as I allow my gloved fingers to rest lightly on the proffered arm.

"Do not think me very foolish," I continue, "but I believe I found the heat too great; and then my father's sermon is longer than usual this morning. I do not like too long a sermon; do you, Sir Ralph?" I question, with a forced lightness in my tone, and with quickly changing countenance.

My companion regards me with a slight astonishment on his face, then replies,

"I am glad your indisposition is no more than may be attributed to the heat, Miss Arden. It certainly was very warm in the church; and then that poor old man's sudden illness may have—"

"Yes, yes, Sir Ralph. That and the heat combined made me feel that I could sit still no longer, and so I came out."

"And now, since I am so fortunate as to have this opportunity of rendering you a slight service, you will allow me to see you to your home, Miss Arden?"

Ah! I had not considered everything! Had not considered that even though Clifford might not meet us on the way to the Vicarage, yet we must pass his home, and he may have returned from Farmer Hobbs! Still, I can't refuse Sir Ralph as escort, be the consequences what they may.

So I murmur forth a few words in compliance with his request, and then we turn off together down the hot and dusty road.

No sign of Clifford at window or on the smooth, green lawn.

I sigh a low sigh of relief, and my spirits return in full force.

"I am expecting Lady Merton to-morrow, Sir Ralph," I remark, as I note how near we are to the Vicarage.

"Yes, Miss Arden! How charming Lady Merton will find the country after the hot London streets! I am perfectly revelling in the fresh air and country scenes."

"Are you making a long stay in the neighbourhood, Sir Ralph?" I ask.

My companion starts slightly, hesitates a second, then bending his face towards me, he replies, very gravely,—

"My stay in this lovely and charming neighbourhood depends upon one thing alone, Miss Arden."

"What is that?" is the question that naturally occurs to me, but I dare not put it—cannot summon up sufficient courage to ask the question, when I know so well from tone, words and manner what the answer will be! Know so well that his stay depends solely upon me! No! I cannot ask it. And yet he seems to expect that I shall.

"Yes," Sir Ralph continues after a brief spell of silence. "I shall hope that the one circumstance which will decide whether I depart or remain may prove favourable."

Then turning again to me, and suddenly arresting his steps, he pursues in quicker, but in lower and more earnest tones,—

"Miss Arden, will you not hope with me that I may have the chance of visiting all the especial bits of Elmleigh scenery?"

This time I must give an answer of some kind or the other. Too well I know that an affirmative reply will be construed into a deeper meaning, and so I am nonplussed.

"Give me my answer, Miss Arden, quickly, please. I see others are approaching, and I want a reply before we are overtaken by them!"

"I cannot give it you now, Sir Ralph, but—"

"Thank you, Miss Arden; later on will do. After service this evening, perhaps. I shall attend it, and will meet you in the churchyard, and then you will give it me. Now," as the Vicarage gates are reached, "I will bid you farewell for the present, Miss Arden."

Bowing courteously, Sir Ralph opens the gate for me and then turns away.

And I? I scarcely know how I compose myself sufficiently to go forward and greet Clifford, who just at that moment emerges from the open drawing-room window.

"Clifford! you here!" I exclaim, rather abruptly.

"Yes, dear. I could not be of much service to poor old Farmer Hobbs. I have prescribed for him, and his friends will see that my orders are carried out. But, Madge, I am very sorry I shall not see anything more of you to-day, for I found a note awaiting me on my return to say that Mrs. Leynton's eldest child is much worse, and I must go at once. But I could not set off without seeing my little Madge, and telling her how disappointed I am that I shall not be able to spend my Sunday afternoon with her."

"I am very sorry too, Clifford," I reply; but even as I utter the words, my face gradually clears, and I am afraid I show my sudden sense of relief—from what?—too plainly, for Clifford replies very gravely,—

"I hope you are, dear. I shall think of you all the time, and perhaps I may be able to get back in time to spend an hour or two with you in our favourite spot."

"I hope you will, Clifford."

The words are not heartily spoken; for I remember Sir Ralph Darrel's question and my promised answer. Ah, well! Fate is deciding for me.

"Good-bye, my darling!" says Clifford, presently, and then lip meets lip, and eye looks into eye, but mine is dropped slightly before my lover's earnest scrutiny. Clifford notes it, for with a half-suppressed sigh he murmurs once again: "Good-bye, my darling," then turns away to his own home.

Dinner is partaken of.

The long afternoon hours pass by all too quickly for me, and then once again the old familiar church bell strikes forth to warn me that once again I must meet Sir Ralph Darrel, and that the moment when I must explain all is drawing very, very near!

With trembling fingers and anxious heart I array myself in my outdoor things, and then set forth down the dusty road.

I am very early, and when I enter the church there is no sign of Sir Ralph in Colonel Ellerton's pew.

The bell ceases, the church fills and the service proceeds, but still no sign of Sir Ralph. I breathe more freely, and begin to regain confidence, and almost flatter myself that he has altered his mind, and that our church will not number him as one of its worshippers this evening, when, just as the first hymn is being sung, his tall form appears down the aisle and enters the Ellerton pew!

Alas for me!

I am only dimly conscious of what is being

sung; I cannot see the words, and their sense is borne to me from afar, so it seems, so confused I become as I reflect on the confession awaiting me.

But the service ends at length, and to my great relief, as my father is about to leave the pulpit, I see the clerk approach him, and in a loud whisper I hear him distinctly inform him that he is wanted in the village.

Clifford away at Mrs. Leynton's, my father safely within some cottage home, what a chance is mine! I rise, and with one swift glance at Sir Ralph, I mix with the outpouring congregation, and so out into the evening air.

Sir Ralph joins me presently, and then silently we turn off down a narrow lane which branches off from the dusty high road, leading to my home, just below the church gate.

Half way down there is a rustic stile, giving entrance to a field, and just across the fence is the residence of Farmer Hobbs, whose illness had so disturbed us all earlier in the day.

I think of this still as I walk silently along by Sir Ralph Darrel's side, and mentally determine that there—at the stile—shall the explanation take place.

We are fast approaching it, when suddenly the silence that has fallen betwixt us is broken by my companion.

"Miss Arden—Miss Madge! What a contrast these two interviews will present?"

"What do you mean, Sir Ralph?" I ask.

He draws nearer my side and lowers his head as the low reply is given.

"Do you not remember that night in May when you and I were together alone on the balcony?"

"Oh, Sir Ralph, I have brought you here purposely to tell you how wrongly I then acted! I am very—very sorry; indeed I am!"

I rush impetuously into my explanation, for I am dreading a renewal of his protestations of love for me—for me, the affianced of Clifford Ralston!

"Why should you thus blame yourself, Miss Madge?" he continues. "I was anxious, of course, to hear my sentence from your lips, but I could not expect but that you should require a little time for decision; and I am here now to repeat any protestation of love that I may then have made, and to receive your answer. I put it, if you remember, in another form this morning. Do you recollect, Miss Madge?"

"Oh, Sir Ralph, please let me tell you how wrongly I have acted; and then—then you—"

I can get no farther; my agitation is too great.

The friendly stile is reached, and leaning my head on its topmost bar, I lower my face, and the tears will flow.

"Miss Madge! What is it? Ah, I see this has been too much for you. I should have remembered your indisposition of this morning. Forgive me, please; I will not expect your answer to-night. To-morrow, perhaps, or another time when you—"

"No, no, Sir Ralph! You must hear all to-night—now, this very minute!—and when you have heard all you will care for me no more!" I hurriedly exclaim, lifting my tear-stained face to him.

But the tender look in my companion's eyes renders my task more arduous than I had at first imagined it. Of course I knew he would be sorry; but I did not dream him capable of such love for me—for me a little country-bred maiden, and he an *habitué* of and dweller amid the fairest and most aristocratic of the *Belgravia monde*!

I had deemed him cold and indifferent, and callous to love's soft imageries, because he had not poured into my ears like speeches such as the generality of cousin Maude's men guests treated me to; and now the face bending down to mine is radiant with the light that love alone can produce. And that love is for me!

"Miss Madge," he replies, slowly—but so

earnestly—"the moment when I shall cease to care for you will never arrive. The moment when I may no longer love you may arrive if—if I am fated to be too late! But that I earnestly hope is not the case. I have been behind the scenes a little, and Lady Merton led me to believe that I need fear no—"

"But she knew nothing of it, for I have never told her! I wish I had done so, and then we should not be here now, Sir Ralph!"

I have spoken plainly enough this time. I see at a glance that my meaning is understood and grasped by my listener.

The bright look in his face fades quickly, and a pained and troubled expression replaces it.

"Miss Madge," he whispers hoarsely, "you do not mean that I am too late? You cannot mean that you are—"

"Sir Ralph, I am engaged already to another; and I have acted very, very wrongly indeed in not telling you so at once that night when you first spoke to me—when we were on the balcony. Oh! Sir Ralph, please forgive me, for I am very sorry!"

Again my face falls forward on my folded hands, again the tears course down my cheeks.

No answer comes from the man at my side. The seconds pass swiftly by, but nothing disturbs the silence save the deep sigh that wells up from the heart of my companion. His silence is more terrible to me than any reproachful words. I can bear it no longer; so, once again uplifting my head, I turn and confront the man whom I led to believe I—

"Oh, Sir Ralph! Do speak to me, please! Do tell me you will forgive me, and I have been so foolish!"

"And she has been so foolish!" I hear him murmur, as his eyes glance upwards at the pale stars just beginning to appear in the blue vault overhead.

"So very foolish," I repeat, "and I am so sorry!"

"And I am so sorry too, Miss Madge," he replies. "So very sorry, that I shall not care to stay another hour in the neighbourhood, but shall now take you home and then return to town."

The words are bitterly spoken, and a hard-set look crosses his face. I am thoroughly frightened at what I have done, and stand like a chidden child with bent head.

"Come, Miss Arden," he continues, "it is getting late, and I am afraid your friends will miss you. Allow me to escort you back to your home."

His coldness and apparent indifference are too much for me!

For all reply I turn away from him, and begin quickly to retrace my steps down the narrow lane.

"Miss Arden! Miss Madge! I am in fault now! You have repeatedly asked my forgiveness for what you have done, and I have withheld it. Oh, Miss Madge! you can never know how deeply I feel this, but—I forgive you. We will part friends, and Heaven bless you, Miss Arden!"

And then he raises my hand to his lips; and I—I can say no more.

Passively I allow myself to be led down the lane, along the high road, and so on to the Vicarage gates.

"Good-bye, Miss Arden; and once again Heaven bless you!" Sir Ralph murmurs; and then I am standing just within the gates alone—while Sir Ralph goes from me for ever!

How wretched I feel, as I creep slowly along to the hall-door! My father is still absent, I find; so leaving a message for him with the servant I betake myself to my chamber. There I give vent to the torrent of tears with which my aching heart is burdened, and again and again blame myself for the part I have played as regards Sir Ralph Darrel.

Cousin Maude is here, and I am fast for getting all my late trouble, while listening to her witty and laughable version of the



and of the season in her dearly-beloved London town.

Dinner is over, and she and I are strolling up and down in the dewy orchard, in the cool of the evening. Only wet, for dear father is away busy with parochial duties, and Clifford—well, Clifford has not been such a constant visitor since the arrival of the fashionably-dressed Lady Merton.

Of course I have confessed all to cousin Maude—and she? At first she laughs most heartily at my rueful face, which I have put on, thinking it befits the occasion; and then, suddenly, her manner changes, and she speaks to me long and seriously of what a wrong part I had played throughout.

First—and this more especially, according to her lights—in contracting an engagement with a mere country practitioner! Of course a town physician would be quite another matter. Secondly—in allowing such a little affair to interfere with my chance of securing such an excellent *parti* as Sir Ralph.

And now, this very evening, as we stroll along, arm-in-arm 'neath the green apple-trees cousin Maude returns to the subject much to my dissatisfaction; for I fancy—and oh! I hope it may prove but fancy—that I am dwelling too much when alone on the late scenes, and recalling, with a sense of satisfied and delightful pride, the bevy of ardent admirers which have so lately clogged my steps at rout or crowded dance. Yes! And then Clifford seems altered—but that may be merely fancy on my part.

But to return. We are fast approaching my favourite resting-place beneath the patriarch of the orchard, when cousin Maude suddenly exclaims,—

"I can't understand any girl who has a secret longing and hoping for town life, with all its delightful excitement, doing such a thing!"

As she speaks she lifts her trailing skirts from the dewy grass, and drawing her lace wraps close round her neck, glances down doubtfully at her dainty shoe.

I contemplate all these movements, then raise my own soft white draperies well above the heads of the golden buttercups, but answer not, only a little sigh will make itself heard as I reflect upon what is to follow. Cousin Maude pats my arm gently with her white jewelled fingers, and resumes,—

"No, Madge, I really can't think how you could be so foolish as to allow the thought of that young—"

"Please say no more, cousin Maude!" I plead.

"Don't interrupt me, Madge. I brought you out here purposely to let you know what I think of your behaviour with regard to Sir Ralph. Of course I had not the slightest idea but that he would follow you down here (though I believe the man fairly hates the country), and having received your father's consent would return to town an engaged man! And now to think that you are about to throw yourself away on a mere country doctor! It is preposterous! But I am determined it shall not be if I can help it!"

A look of triumph crosses cousin Maude's face as she speaks—a look which I am better able to translate later on.

Then I sum up courage, and with bent head and averted eyes I ask, faintly and timidly,—

"Cousin Maude, ought a girl to marry the man she loves, even though he be poor; or the man who can endow her with all that heart can desire, even though she does not know whether her feeling for him be of love's own kindling or no?"

I wait with hot and blushing face for her reply. It does not come for a few minutes, and when it does I fancy I detect a strange ring in her voice, a harsh and discordant sound as though the heart's true tones were being muffled and suppressed and falsified for the time being.

"Madge, you are like all other young girls of your age and bringing up," she replies.

"You think the world is made for love, and

you are still wrapt in youth's rosy-hued garments. Believe me, ere long, the garment will be exchanged for the more sober-hued cloak of reality; and then you will find how true my words are, how foolishly you are now acting."

"But, cousin Maude," I argue, impatiently, "it cannot be wrong to love! You surely you must have loved your husband!"

"Loved my husband! You poor little country-mouse to harbour still the theory which your seventeen summers still learns you, that all the couples you meet with were brought together by Cupid's shaft! Love and Lord Merton were indeed very far apart. No, no, Madge; I respected my late husband very much, and I grieved and mourned for him when he died, but my heart was never his. He knew it, poor man; but he was satisfied with the small amount of affection I still could bestow on him. Yes, love is all very well, but—"

"But, cousin Maude, did you never love?" I ask, almost indignantly.

"Did I never love, Madge? Yes, long, long ago. When I was young I loved as passionately and fervently as you would tell me, to-day, that you love Clifford Ralston; but Fate willed it otherwise. My love grew suspicious, then jealous, and so I hardened my heart, and when Lord Merton appeared on the scene I accepted him and his vast wealth, and I have never since regretted the step."

I glance up eagerly, for again I detect the false ring in my cousin's voice; and this time my eyes prove to me that words will often give the lie to the heart's truest feelings. For even as I look, the light in cousin Maude's eyes dims, while the lace on her bodice rises and falls, as though the heart beneath is strongly agitated.

"I wish I had never seen Sir Ralph Darrel!" I exclaim, passionately, more to myself I believe.

"You foolish child!" exclaimed my companion. "Why wish that?"

"Because everything seems to have gone wrong since—since he spoke to me on the balcony," I sob.

"Ah, I thought he had spoken, Madge, though you never made a confidante of me at the time, and I must say I felt rather vexed, but never said anything. And so he asked my little country-cousin to go with him and reign as loved and petted wife amid the fine old rooms at Atherton Towers? And what did you answer, Madge?"

"Nothing then, cousin Maude."

"Ah! then you have met since?" she questions, stopping and glancing searchingly into my face. We have reached the furthest end of the orchard, and are standing by the wooden paling which skirts the dusty high road.

Faint sounds of approaching footsteps make themselves heard. I listen intently, for something within tells me that Clifford is near. I hesitate while my companion draws closer around her still the wraps, and leans her white and rounded arm on the wooden fence.

Nearer and nearer draw the footsteps, and now I can distinguish the form of my lover—Clifford Ralston. Still I reply not.

Cousin Maude grows impatient, and then, just as the approaching form is within ear-shot, she again questions in her clear, ringing voice,—

"Madge, tell me, dear. Am I not correct in supposing that you have met Sir Ralph since that night on the balcony?"

"Oh cousin Maude, I can't tell you now!" I exclaim in low tones; even as I speak, Clifford is before us, hat in hand, and with his sweet, but grave smile playing around his handsome mouth.

"Ah, Dr. Ralston! we are so much obliged to you for appearing just at this moment. Madge and I were just growing envious of each other's society, so that your arrival is most opportune."

"I am glad that it is so, Lady Merton,"

gravely replies my lover, glancing keenly at my blushing and disconcerted face meanwhile. I meet the gaze for an instant, then lower my eyes in confusion; for can he have overheard cousin Maude's last speech? I fancy not, and yet why that look? And then a little wilful spirit hovers around me, and I toss my head slightly as I turn away and call to my companions as I go,—

"I am going down into the village to meet papa. You will excuse me, cousin Maude, now that you have another companion."

And then, before either can reply, I am running quickly, with uplifted skirt, through the dewy grass,—running very fast, but when I reach the little wicket-gate I do not turn my steps towards the village.

No! But on through the sweet-scented garden, and in at the open hall-door and up to my chamber.

Arrived there I turn the key in the lock, and then sinking into my favourite seat I cover my face with my hands and give vent to a flood of tears.

My thoughts fly backward, and again I see, in fancy, Sir Ralph's sad face as he turned away from my father's gate that evening when I told him all.

And then I think of Clifford and what he would say did he know all. But this latter thought soon passes and gives place quickly to the former—Sir Ralph Darrel.

Unconsciously almost I whisper, over and over again, the name; and then I actually smile as I dwell in fancy upon the handsome form of the owner of that high-sounding name.

"And he has condescended to admire you," whispers a voice within.

And as I listen to the same a hot flush of gratified triumph mounts to my brow, and again I smile.

Then some of cousin Maude's indignant speeches recur to me, but chief among them is one used that night when I told her first of my engagement to Clifford Ralston. I see her face distinctly, her fine lips curling slightly while she listens; then comes the scorn mixed with bitterness.

"And you might have been Lady Darrel!" Lady Darrel. How well it sounds to my maiden ears.

So I dream on and on of my handsome, aristocratic admirer, and see not the dark shadow looming in the distance.

Dangerous dreaming this for a young girl such as I; and a dreaming that is treason against my true and noble lover—poor country practitioner though he be.

But for the time I am intoxicated with a certain triumph, begot chiefly of my late visit to town, and so blinded I rush madly on to—But the story will tell itself.

At this point I recollect my duties as hostess; so, rising, I bathe my tear-stained flushed face, and prepare to descend whither duty calls me. Downstairs, in our pretty, flower-scented drawing-room, I find cousin Maude at the piano playing dreamy bits from Chopin, while standing a little removed is Clifford, engaged in turning over a portfolio of music which I have brought from town.

"All my new songs are there, Clifford!" I say, as I pass him by on my way to a low table at the other end of the room, whereon lies the fancy work with which I beguile the hours occasionally.

"Yes. I see my favourite is here! You must please sing it for me presently, Madge," he replies.

"Which is that?" I question.

Clifford holds up to my view the song he has selected. I glance carelessly up, but the hot blood will suffuse my face as I read the title—"Never to Part."

Ah! How many times have I sung same song with Sir Ralph standing by, and leaning over, now and then, to turn the leaves. But Clifford's eyes are upon me. So I thrust away all thoughts and recollections of that other, and make reply,—

"I admire your taste, Clifford, and I will

do my best to render it as it should be sung." Then I resume my fancy work.

Cousin Maude's fair, jewelled fingers still wander over the ivory keys, and Clifford still turns leaf after leaf of my music, stopping now and again to read the words.

And then, I know not what, but my heart beats quicker, and I feel impelled by a something within me to watch my lover's face as he studies the words of my new songs.

My hands fall idly to my lap, and I lean forward slightly until my breath comes faster and faster.

A smile irradiates Clifford's face as he reads the concluding words of the song he holds in his hand, then disappears, as with a slight sigh he places the piece with the pile he has already examined.

A pause ensues, while cousin Maude's playing rises to a wail, then dies away in a pretty, soft air. Clifford seems listening intently to the latter, for his fingers are still and his eyes fixed on the title-page of the next song.

I bend still more forward and read distinctly the words in good bold print—"Oh! my Lost Love." And as I read them Sir Ralph's sad face again appears in misty outline before my mental vision.

The words of the song seem to come surging towards me, borne on my ear in his tones; his eyes seem to be bent upon my face in gentle, and pleading, such as I had noted in the dim and gathering twilight that Sabbath evening when—

Crash! My straying thoughts were back again. Clifford is standing over all my scattered music, while cousin Maude is looking on with flushed and slightly angered expression on her handsome face.

"What is it?" I ask, as I rise and approach the scene of confusion.

"I must beg your pardon, Lady Morton, for thus disturbing you, but I believe I was startled at a mere nothing. I will just collect these scattered songs, and then I must be returning homewards. Once again, Lady Morton, I apologise for thus startling you."

"It is of no consequence," cousin Maude replies, with a haughty and formal bend of her dark head; then she resumes her playing.

But no dismal wail—no pretty, simple air proceeds from her jewelled fingers this time, but in their stead a brilliant march, whose triumphal tones seem reflected, in a measure, in the player's handsome face. The slim, white fingers descended with a crash on the ivory keys, while the full lips assume a curled and triumphant expression. And all this time Clifford is on his knees, collecting one by one the pieces which he has let fall through his carelessness.

I watch in silence and wonder greatly at the change which has come over my lover's face. His lips are firmly shut and his brows knitted, as though he were suppressing some great feeling.

Perhaps cousin Maude's haughty recognition of his apology has angered him, I reflect; while I still watch in silence till the last song lies again with the others in its place in the portfolio.

Then Clifford rises, places the latter in its former position, turning to cousin Maude mutters forth a few words of polite farewell, then with a faint bow in my direction he goes forth, closing the door after him—gone without the song he asked me to sing!

Lost in astonishment I rush quickly to the window from which a view of the road—his homeward route—can be observed, and strain my gaze eagerly in that direction.

In the uncertain twilight I note that my lover's head is bent low as he walks with noisy footsteps down the gravel-path, and so out into the high road. As the gate closes behind him cousin Maude brings her triumphal march to an end, and then joins me at the window.

"What have you done, little Madge, to offend your good lover?" she asks, in light, mocking tones.

"I do not think Clifford is offended with me," I return; then add, prompted to it by the same wilful little sprite, "and I do not mind so very much if he be offended."

"You have just my spirit, little Madge!" cousin Maude answers, "and I do not wonder at your not taking it to heart, considering your late triumphs, and securing such a prize as all the Belgravian girls are dying to obtain! Now that our dear and respected doctor has left us once again alone, come and sit down here by me, and tell me all about your last meeting with Sir Ralph."

"I cannot to-night, cousin Maude; it is too late; and listen, there is the prayer-bell."

"Ah, I am sorry! I do hope your dear father will not dwell too long upon the miseries of Jeremiah. I am positively sleepy, though it is only ten o'clock," replies cousin Maude.

Then, arm-in-arm, we repair to my father's study, where await us the rest of the household. That night, later on, I dream of Sir Ralph Darrel, and his name is on my lips when I awake in the broad July sunshine the following morning.

Three months later, and a bright sunshiny afternoon in October. Time, three o'clock. Clifford and I are walking briskly along the road in the direction of Ellerton Woods, for Clifford is on his way to visit one of the gamekeepers who has met with a rather dangerous gun-accident. And I am his companion; and, must I add, his unwilling companion? For since that July evening, during cousin Maude's visit, when we were both so startled by Clifford's strange behaviour, a certain coolness has sprung up between my love and myself. And yet not a word has been uttered by either that could in any way throw light or certify a reason of this coolness; but still it exists, almost imperceptible and indefinable at times; then again asserting and making its presence felt by long lapses of silence, and an absence of those endearing epithets and tender glances with which lovers are apt and prone to indulge in when no third person is by.

Strange to say this increasing frigidity of manner on Clifford's part—this absence of loving acts—does not vex me in the least. And yet, of course, generally speaking, I ought to feel slighted and be highly indignant at such unlovely behaviour.

But no! And there is a reason for my not resenting Clifford's indifference. Shall I confess it?

During the long spells of silence, which so often occur, when he and I are strolling through the orchard, or sitting side by side on the gnarled branches of the "patriarch," my thoughts are far, far away, and the lover at my side has no part or lot in them. No! his place is supplied by another manly form!

Before me, day after day, arises the sad face of Sir Ralph Darrel; while again and again I start guiltily, and am time after time upon the point of confessing all to Clifford, when—

Well, something always intervenes, and so I keep my secret to myself and continue my day-dreams, in which my other admirer figures more conspicuously than does the one who is ever present.

And thus does the summer wane and pass away, and cool, bright-tinted autumn takes up her sceptre and sheds her rainbow halo on all around.

And day by day I ask myself what I am to do should Clifford plead for a day to be fixed for our marriage, for I feel and know I dare not go to the altar with the one, while my heart is thus restlessly hovering betwixt the two!

For at times the old love returns in full force; and were it not for Clifford's coolness I persuade myself that all would be again as before that London visit of mine.

And then cousin Maude writes so frequently, and in each letter some covert allusion is made to Sir Ralph, and in some way

or the other she contrives to edge in a little hint respecting the contrast that exists between a country and town life.

And still the days go by, and I grow more and more uncertain as to whether I acted rightly in telling Sir Ralph the truth, and thus vanishing him from me for ever.

Had I waited a little while, perhaps I might have become—

Here I hesitate, and tell myself that I am a very wicked girl not to be satisfied with such a noble and true-hearted lover as Clifford Ralston has proved himself hitherto.

But to return.

Clifford and I have traversed half of the distance, and not a word has escaped either one, till we arrive at the entrance to Ellerton Woods. Clifford remarks, as he holds open the gate for me to pass in—

"I hope we shall not fall in with any of the Colonel's guests."

I glance up quickly, and note the almost stony look on my lover's face.

"It will not much matter if we do," I reply, carelessly; then add, "especially as we are not acquainted with any of them."

"I heard your cousin, Lady Morton, mention the name of a gentleman who is, I believe, visiting at Ellerton Park at present."

"Ah, one of her London acquaintances, I daresay."

"Yes. The one I allude to is Sir Ralph Darrel. Did you meet him at all, Madge?"

I can't help the rush of crimson that will flood my face and neck as the name of the man who so fills my day-dreams falls from my lover's lips.

I stop hastily and stoop to pluck a wee floweret, in order to conceal the agitation I cannot wholly restrain at mention of Sir Ralph's name.

The stalk of the floweret proves rather tough, and thus I gain a few seconds' respite before responding.

"Look! what a lovely shade of violet!" I exclaim, holding my prize up to Clifford's gaze.

"Very, indeed," he gravely replies; then adds, "but I think you met Sir Ralph Darrel during your visit to Lady Morton, Madge!"

"Sir Ralph Darrel? Oh, yes, he came once or twice; I believe I remember him slightly" the last word tremblingly and confusedly spoken, though I had willed it otherwise, and my head will drop, though I would will to hold it erect as ever.

"Only slightly, Madge?"

"Why do you ask, Clifford?" I question, rather haughtily.

"Shall I tell you why, Madge? Yes. I think the time has now come, and I will tell you what I know. Madge, did you ever see this before to-day?" Clifford hurriedly asks as he takes from his pocket a cabinet-sized photograph, and holds it up before my astonished gaze.

"Sir Ralph Darrel!" I exclaim, while a hot, burning flood of crimson again suffuses my face, as my eyes rest upon the well-remembered features, and then quickly vanishes, leaving me white and trembling. And all the time I feel instinctively that my companion's gaze is anxiously fastened upon me, while still my eyes seem riveted to the likeness he holds before me.

"Yes, this is a photograph of Sir Ralph Darrel, Madge; but whether a true one or the reverse I can't possibly pass an opinion, as I have never yet had the honour of making his acquaintance."

"Where did you get it, Clifford?"

"Did you ever receive such a photograph from Lady Morton, or—? but I can't believe that possible! and you must forgive my asking it, Madge. I was about to add, or from Sir Ralph himself!"

"Never, Clifford!" I indignantly reply, though still I gaze wistfully at the well-remembered features. Well-remembered—for have they not been present in my day-dreams now for many a day past?

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculates Clifford, and



there is a certain subdued gladness and relief in the accents of his voice that I glance up at him hastily, and add,—

"And I can't possibly imagine where you found this," touching it daintily with my gloved finger.

"That is my secret, Madge, and I do not think it would be wise to impart it to you, since you know nothing of it, evidently. No, I will destroy it at once, and then I shall feel easier and more satisfied. Oh, Madge! if you had confessed to its ownership I do not know what would have become of me! But now I feel such a relief, such a return to a happiness to which I have been a stranger for some time past. Now we will destroy this photo and throw the pieces to the autumn winds."

So saying, Clifford prepares to rend the likeness in two, when I suddenly lay my hands upon it and exclaim,—

"Stay, Clifford! It may belong to cousin Maude."

"I do not care in the least who may be the owner of it, provided it be not my own little Madge," replies Clifford, at the same time withdrawing the photo from my grasp; and encircling me with his arm he stoops and lays his lips on mine with all his old fondness and tenderness of manner.

"And now, Madge, for the demolition of another's property!"

I am powerless to stay the act; in a few seconds the ground around us is strewn with little bits of card-board. I glance at one as it floats earthward with upturned face, and on it I note the features of the man who I am learning to allow my thoughts to dwell upon so constantly.

Dare I stoop and pick it up?

I am two or three paces in the rear, and Clifford will never see! I am just in the act of stooping—the small and jagged piece of card-board is almost within my grasp—when my lover's voice sounds in my ears.

"That is right, Madge," he says, carelessly. "Pick it up and tear it in still smaller bits. Who knows but Sir Ralph Darrel may pass this way later on, and I would not that he should puzzle his brains, to the extent he doubtless would, as to who had thus ruthlessly destroyed such a flattering portrait of himself!"

The tears are not far off, as in my mortification, and not daring to refuse, I tear off first the well-shaped mouth, then the nose, and finally the eyes part company; for, in my anxiety I retain as long as possible the image of Sir Ralph. I take infinite pains to render the pieces as minute as possible. But the end comes, and the last tiny morsel flutters from my fingers and floats earthward, and finally rests on the yellow and sere frond of a bracken near by.

"Now for my patient in good earnest! We have dawdled sadly, Madge, and yet I do not regret the time wasted thus!" Clifford exclaims, as he takes my unresisting hand and lays it within his arm, and so onward in silence till the keeper's cottage appears to view.

"I will wait outside, Clifford! I do not care to sit indoors with old Granny Martin. She is so deaf that it is quite a labour to exchange even a few sentences."

"Very well, Madge, I shall not be long. Which way do you intend taking, in case I should not see you when I come out?"

There lie four grassy paths before me. I must choose one, and Fate is at my side.

"I will walk down here," I reply, advancing towards the one nearest to us.

"Good-bye for the present, then, Madge; I shall not be long."

And now I am free for a short time, and the first use I make of my freedom is to draw forth my handkerchief and wipe away the tears, which, though restricted in my lover's presence, now trickle quickly down my cheeks. And then my thoughts revert to the subject which is causing my grief.

"I can't possibly imagine where Clifford found it," I murmur, ever so softly, for I am fearful lest any of Colonel Ellerton's guests should be near. "Cousin Maude must have

brought it with her, and left it lying about; but then why should Clifford have stolen it from her, and what induced him to take such an interest in a man of whom he knows nothing? Unless—"

And then I stop, and noting a fallen trunk at the side of the grassy path I approach it, and seat myself thereon; then I resume my musings.

My last word "unless" has recalled to me the evening when cousin Maude and I strolled in the orchard, and Clifford joined us from the road; and all too distinctly I remember, like a flash, the import of her speech previous to Clifford joining us.

Yes; it has been as I feared, and Clifford must have overheard cousin Maude's words.

So absorbed do I become in my retrospections and recollections that I fairly start from my seat on the fallen trunk with a slight scream as a black-and-tan terrier breaks from the brushwood at my side, and greets me with loud and noisy barking.

"Down, Vixen, down!" exclaims a voice at the same moment from behind me; then adds, "Allow me to apologise for my dog thus startling you."

Hurriedly I turn, and there, hat in hand, and bowing courteously, is Sir Ralph Darrel.

"Miss Arden! This is, indeed, an unexpected pleasure!" the latter exclaims, holding forth his hand meanwhile.

With hot and blushing face I put forth mine also, and allowed it to rest unresistingly in the firm grasp with which it is imprisoned.

"I did not expect to meet you, Sir Ralph!" I stammered forth, after a few seconds of inexpressible confusion, during which Sir Ralph has continued to retain my fingers within his.

"Nor I you, Miss Arden, though I hoped that Fate would be kind to me, and, you see, she has not disappointed me. But my dog has disturbed you, Miss Arden; allow me to lead you again to your seat."

And with the same stately grace and courtesy as though he was in a crowded drawing-room, Sir Ralph places my hand within his arm, and leads me to the fallen trunk.

Then seating himself in careless attitude he whistles to his dog, who is roaming restlessly in and out of the brushwood, while I remain still in a semi-state of delighted confusion.

I had so often dreamed of a meeting since that fair Sabbath evening, when my own lips had given Sir Ralph his *congé*, and now it has come—this longed-for meeting. And I feel powerless to say or do anything.

"The time has seemed long to me since—since we parted, Miss Arden. Has it been the same to you? But, no! That is a foolish question of mine, for, of course, there are so many things a woman can take pleasure in, and they serve admirably to pass away the time; while for us men, we have nothing to fall back upon but our pipes, and then often amid their smoke our thoughts revert to pleasanter and happier times, and we in fancy go over the 'might-have-been.' Ah! believe me, Miss Arden, there is nothing sadder on this earth than that terrible 'might-have-been!'"

And so Sir Ralph talks on, and ever and anon his eyes are turned full upon me, and I return their glances in a shy and confused way.

Once I read in them a look of such—well, a look that causes me to lower my gaze, and which covers my face with blushes. While still his low, soft voice sounds in my ear, filling me with pleasure and yet with pain at the same moment.

My delight at this meeting knows no bounds; but it is followed so closely by the recollection that Clifford may appear at any moment that I sorely know which predominates—the pleasure or the pain.

"You are not wandering here alone, Miss Arden? If so, you will allow me the pleasure of escorting you back to the Rectory?"

"I am waiting here for—for someone, Sir Ralph," I stammer; "and I must be going now, or we may miss one another."

I rise as I speak, and with a quick and hurried bow am turning away, when a hand is laid unceremoniously on my shoulder, and a voice—oh, how it thrills me!—sounds close in my ear.

"Going so soon, Miss Arden, and without any other farewell than a formal hand? And I have so longed, so hoped for another meeting, and now it is ended thus!"

"I did not mean to be stiff and formal, Sir Ralph; but I must go. Here is Clifford."

"Good-bye, then, Miss Arden! We shall meet again, Madge."

He raises his hat courteously and turns away, while I walk forwards to meet my lover. A dark shade rests on Clifford's brow; but his tone is cheery enough as he greets me.

"I have not kept you waiting long, Madge? And I hope I did not interrupt Sir Ralph Darrel's conversation. Was he inquiring for his photograph, or were you giving him a detailed account of its recent demolition?"

"I have only spoken a very few words to Sir Ralph, Clifford; none but what anyone might have been a listener to," I reply, somewhat loftily.

"I do not doubt you, Madge, dear. But, thank Heaven, I was not far off!" he mutters rather to himself than to me.

Again the set lips and knitted brows. I feel very much annoyed. What possible harm can there be in my thus conversing with one whom I have so often met in my cousin Maude's presence?

"Madge, do you believe in dreams?"

The question comes from Clifford. I am spending the afternoon at his home. Mrs. Ralston, always more or less an invalid, has just left us and gone indoors to her sofa by the low French window, from which, as she laughingly tells us, she can still view our dear forms.

"Madge, do you believe in dreams?"

We are standing together on the small, smooth lawn facing the parlour window, through which I catch a glimpse of Mrs. Ralston's white cap, when my love puts his question.

"Do I believe in dreams? What a strange question, Clifford. No, of course I do not; at least, I hope I am not so silly," I reply, rather scornfully, as I turn and walk away towards a small arbour, almost hidden from view by the glossy laurels growing around it.

My lover follows me and seats himself by my side.

"Madge, dear, I have a reason for asking you. I used not to believe in the supernatural, but I have had good cause lately to think with Byron that 'They speak like sybils of the future!'"

"Clifford, how strangely you talk. But I remember now you spoke of a dream that seemed to haunt you on the night of my return home from cousin Maude's. I asked you, then to relate it to me, but you would not!" I exclaim, rather pettishly.

"I recollect it all, Madge, dear! I did not satisfy your curiosity then, as I did not deem it necessary; but now, perhaps, it is better that you should know that, and also our secret."

"Whose secret, Clifford?"

"My mother's and mine, darling. Listen. Lay your hand in mine and hear me patiently. You are not cold, dear?"

"No; oh, no, Clifford. Tell me the dream—and the secret!" I answer quickly, at the same time obeying Clifford's request, and placing my hand within his.

Silence for a few seconds, while my lover looks up at the October sky overhead, and I watch the expression of his face. Still with upturned face he speaks again:—

"Madge, I will begin with the secret. Four years ago this very month I had a sister living."

"A sister, Clifford?" I interrupt, quickly.

"Yes, dear. A little sister as pretty and charming as yourself! And I worshipped her almost, and so did my mother. She was the

light of our small home after my father died, and we both thought so much of her. Dear little Kitty! And then one fair summer's morn there came to our small village a wandering artist—a man of about forty, with fine figure, and large dark eyes, and grave, yet fascinating, manner.

"A week passed by and rumours reached our small household of the beautiful bits of scenery dashed off in free and careless style by this stranger-artist. And Kitty, my own dear little sister, laughingly said that she must see the paintings. She was fond of her brush, and had some taste, though at present uncultivated. Day by day she wished more and more for a sight of the stranger's canvas; and at length she had her wish gratified. Ah! how well I remember that bright May evening, when, sitting alone with my mother in our pretty sitting-room, the door suddenly flew open and Kitty entered with sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks, and then her tale was told; and harmless enough it seemed to us that fair May evening, and merrily enough we joined in Kitty's clear, happy laughter, as she told in her pretty way all the incidents connected with her casual meeting with the stranger-artist, and her view of his wonderful sketches.

"Ay! we could neither of us foretell the future, nor divine for an instant that the day would come when the thought and remembrance of that evening, which was fraught with so much merriment to us then, would be as gall and bitterness to our hearts hereafter! The weeks flew by, and the artist was no longer a stranger to us, but a frequent guest at our table. And Kitty—our dear, innocent Kitty—well! it was easily seen from the beginning what a charm his presence had for her. All the love of her sweet maiden heart was showered upon Ralph Gordon!"

(I started visibly at mere mention of the familiar name—*Christian*.)

"You are cold, Madge, dear? I can finish another time."

"Go on, please. It was only a—a spider that made me start so."

Clifford draws still closer to me, then continues,—

"Yes, my own dear sister loved Ralph Gordon with all her heart; and shamefully he returned her maiden confidence!"

Clifford pauses, while an angry look passes rapidly over his countenance.

"Villain!" he mutters beneath his breath, whilst his right hand is raised and clenched, as though against some hidden foe.

"Clifford! Don't look so!" I murmur, leaning my head against his shoulder, while the tears will trickle down my cheeks.

At my words—at my action—Clifford starts. Then, glancing down at my tear-stained cheeks, murmurs tenderly,—

"My own little Madge! Did I frighten you, dear? I will not finish my—"

"Oh, please go on, Clifford!" I plead.

"Your little sister—what happened next?"

"Poor little Kitty! She gave her wealth of love, and received in return—a broken heart! They were married, and this Ralph Gordon took her away to some quiet seaside lodgings—only for a time, he assured my mother. But he feared to declare his marriage to his friends just then, as he did not wish to offend an old uncle who was very rich, and whose estates, he hoped, and had every reason to expect, he should inherit should he continue to please him till the time of his death. And so in tears and sorrow we let our Kitty go away with her artist-husband. And for a time all seemed well with her. Her weekly budget of domestic news was bright and cheerful in its tone.

"Then came a change. But I will not harm your feelings by relating minutely all that happened to our dear little Kitty. The months passed by; and then, just as she was looking forward to holding in her arms her first-born child, the end came.

"My mother was hastily summoned, and three weeks later all was over; and our bright

and pretty Kitty lay beneath the sod in the small churchyard just within the sound of the restless waves she had learned to love in her lonely widowhood! for I learnt it all from my mother later on, to whom Kitty had confessed all a few hours before her end came.

"Her husband had soon tired of her pretty face and artless ways, and, with some excuse or the other, had gone his way for weeks at a time, and left her to bear, as well she might, the rôle of neglected wife! Where he went, she was ignorant—or pretended to be—though mother always thinks she had the clue, but would not reveal it to her husband's dishonour. Poor loving and true little Kitty! Oh, Madge! you can never know how we have mourned her, but we keep her wooing, her marriage, and her death a secret now, for it all seems so sacred to us that we naturally shrink from letting strangers into our confidence. But you—you will soon be one of us, darling! therefore I have told you this—my mother wished it also. And then, again, another reason is, Madge, I believe that you have met this man, and I dread his fascinating ways! I have been warned in a dream!"

Clifford speaks hurriedly and excitedly; then stops suddenly and glances round him, as though fearful of listeners. While I—a fearful idea has flashed through my brain! Can Sir Ralph Darrel and the husband of Clifford's sister be the same? And then, again, what can possibly have suggested the idea to me? I can not say; but I feel so sure that I am correct in my surmises that I do not hasten Clifford for any further explanation and enlightenment upon the subject.

Five minutes or thereabouts passes by in silence, then Clifford speaks again.

"Now for my dream, Madge. I dreamed that you and I were together in some fair, flowery meadow, through which flowed a wide and silvery stream; we stood together, hand in hand, and watched it as it flowed gently onward. Suddenly another figure came into view, and took up its position exactly facing us, but on the other bank of the stream. It stood there silently and motionless; then suddenly raised its left hand and beckoned to you. You smiled in return, and slipped your hand quickly from my grasp, then took a step or two forward, as though you would leave me for that other; but, even as your feet trod the brink of the stream, a chasm opened, and you disappeared! At the same instant a loud laugh of mockery and derision issued from the lips of the figure on the opposite bank, while I fell senseless to the earth. That is my dream, Madge. Not very dreadful in the telling, you will say; but I yet feel thankful that it was only a dream!"

"But the figure, Clifford, that beckoned to me—did you know it, or recognize it?"

"I did, Madge; and therein lies all my terror!"

All my bygone day-dreams, in which Sir Ralph Darrel's face and form had figured so constantly and so conspicuously, recur suddenly to me; and, faint with suppressed agitation, I falter forth, "Who was it, Clifford?"

"It was the face and form of the man who ruined my sister's happiness! It was the face and form of him whose likeness we destroyed together in Ellerton Woods, Madge!"

"But, Clifford; that was the photograph of Sir Ralph Darrel!" I exclaim.

"Sir Ralph Darrel now, Madge. His hopes have been realised, and he has succeeded to the title and estates he so coveted. But Sir Ralph Darrel or plain Ralph Gordon, the man is the same for all that. And you have met him, Madge!—have been thrown in his way in crowded ball-room, and have stood with him in the moonlit balcony, and, thank Heaven, have come back to me unscathed!"

Oh! the rush of shame that dyes my soul then as my lover speaks!

Unscathed! I, who have, day by day, been treacherously devoting the hours to dreaming of another than my lawful lover!

The twilight is gathering fast now, and I

comfort myself that my face is too much in the shade for Clifford to read all the agitation thereon; but speak I must.

"Clifford! The photograph—where did you find it?"

"Where I found one of the same once long before, when he came as Kitty's lover, Madge."

"Where was that?" I stammer forth.

"Enclosed within the leaves of a song that my sister was accustomed to sing to us all in the twilight evenings," Clifford replies, sadly.

"Ah, I remember now! But he did not put it there, I feel certain, for I sorted all my music only—"

"Never mind, dear, who put it there," answers Clifford. "I am quite satisfied that it did not find its way there through the agency of these little fingers," says my lover, bending low his head, and laying his lips on my ungloved hand.

Again the rush of shame to my heart, as I listen to my dear, generous, unsuspecting lover!

Shame? Ay! I know so well how much I have to be ashamed of as memory bears it all back to me. I feel wretched and miserable enough at this moment.

"Clifford, I am cold."

"We will go indoors to the mother, dear."

• • • • •

The last scene rises before me.

"Madge, I have just come from Ellerton Park. Mrs. Bonce's granddaughter is staying with her. She is as delicate as ever, and has been obliged to remain in her bed the last few days. Poor thing, I fear she is very ill!"

"I am so sorry, father."

"Yes; I knew you would feel it, Madge. You used to take such an interest in her when she was in the school."

"She was such a pretty, clever little thing, father! I think I will go up and see her this afternoon."

"Well, my dear, I was going to give you Mrs. Bonce's message, which is to the effect that she would take it as a very great favour if Miss Madge would come and see her Ellen. And you will go, Madge?"

"Yes, father. I am expecting Clifford, but he will not mind when he knows where I am. And, happy thought, he can come for me! These November days are so short that it will be quite dark before I set out to return."

"Yes; Clifford can come and fetch you, Madge. I am glad you will go to-day, for I fear poor Ellen's hours are numbered," my father replies.

"Oh, father, so ill as that!" I exclaim.

"I fear so, Madge."

Later on in the day, about half-past three o'clock, I find myself sitting by the bed-side of poor Ellen Bonce.

A faint, sweet smile irradiates her once pretty face, as I read from the Book.

"One chapter more," she murmurs, as I at length close the leaves and glance up towards her. "Just one more please, Miss Madge!" she pleads.

"I cannot refuse her, so turn again to the place where I have been reading, and commence."

The time slips quickly by. Already it is getting dusk, and I think of my homeward walk.

I bring my reading to a close and take my farewell of the dying girl.

"Do not trouble to come down with me, Mrs. Bonce; I can find my way out, and I want to go into the library for a book of poems which the Colonel said I might have to read. Do not let me take you away from Ellen; I can find my way easily."

Mrs. Bonce yields at length, and I descend the grand old staircase and make my way to the library. Silence reigns throughout the house.

Colonel Ellerton and family are abroad for the winter, and there is but one servant at present under Mrs. Bonce.



In the library it is darker still. Some of the shutters are still barred.

I cross the room, and make my way to the window, which exactly faces the shelves where I know I shall find the poet I seek. I unfasten the heavy shutters, and fold them back, then look out. A woman's face is pressed close against the pane, and her eyes are peering eagerly, though cautiously, into the room.

With a slight exclamation I turn away, and cross to the book-shelves.

"Who is the woman?" I wonder. "Some friend of the servants, I suppose."

Concluding thus, I continue my search unconcernedly. The volume is found at length, and in my eagerness I open it and glance down at the lines.

"How beautiful!" I murmur softly, as I turn another page and read on.

So absorbed do I become in the poet's thrilling language that I am deaf and blind, for the time being, to all around me, and start aside with a slight scream, as a voice sounds in my ear, and close to me.

"We have met again then, Madge! I prophesied to you in the words that day that we should, and I am a true prophet."

"Sir Ralph Darrel!" I gasp.

"Yes, Madge. And you are glad to see me?"

As he speaks he bends forward, and takes my hand in his.

I really am too astonished—too frightened—to offer any resistance, for he seems so changed! The same fine figure, the same handsome face and dark eyes; but the expression in the latter! Ah! I shudder as I glance up and note it all! Like a flash, too, comes the recollection of his dead wife.

Again he speaks.

"Madge, I have sought long how I might bring about this meeting, and now Fate has laid it at my feet. Madge, now I can tell you what I have suffered since last we parted, and now I can hear from your lips that you will no longer look coldly on me, or set aside my love!"

As he utters the last words a low hissing sound makes itself distinctly heard from the direction of the window against which I had seen the woman's face pressed.

"Sir Ralph, you forget that—that I am already promised to—"

"Ah! yes. To the respected doctor of this small village, Madge. No, I do not forget anything; only that is swallowed up in the other thought that has taken complete possession of me. I mean the thought of the great love which I have for you. Madge! think before you reject my love of the advantages which it can bring you! Think of all this, weigh it well in your mind with that other love offered you, and choose mine. Your happiness will be my first and last thought. Madge! Madge! I love you! Do not reject my love!"

Again the hissing sound, but this time far more distinct. It reaches my companion's ear, too, for he starts and glances round with knitted brow and stern eyes.

"What is it?" I almost shrieked, for the whole scene is overcoming me fast.

"Nothing, Madge, that need thus alarm you. I will just go out and prove to you that there is no one outside. You wait here for me."

Sir Ralph releases my hands, and turns away. I sink into a chair near by, and burying my head and face in my hands sob aloud.

"Oh, Clifford! where are you?" I cry in my sorrow. And then, even as I utter his name, I hear his voice in the hall. I rise, and rush to the door and look out, only just in time to see his figure disappear round a corner, in company with—

And here a fit of trembling seizes me, and I am compelled again to seek shelter in the library; for the terrible dread has entered into my very soul, and I wait with loud beating heart my lover's return.

For Clifford is in company with that other—and harm may befall him.

And then I recollect the expression in Sir Ralph's eyes as he had bent them on me a few minutes previously—such a look of passionate and intense feeling, as though the man could be, and would be, capable of anything or everything.

Still the moments creep slowly by, and still I am alone in the darkening library, with naught for company but the shadow of the dread thought that flashed across my brain as I saw Clifford's form disappear.

And then all my past rises before me, and I see how wrongly I have acted throughout; recognise the fact that I am to blame for Sir Ralph's presence here this afternoon, for I ought to have confessed my engagement to him long ago.

But it is too late to recall the past. I must bear the consequences of my foolish pride and wrong-doing.

Another ten minutes passes thus, and then Clifford enters the room. I spring towards him with a little glad cry of relief and joy as he draws me very close to his heart, and murmurs,—

"She is still my little Madge! Though the serpent has been near her again still she is free from his trail, thank Heaven!"

"Oh, Clifford, where is Sir Ralph?" I ask.

My lover puts me from him quickly, and in the dusky twilight searches my face eagerly with deep and questioning gaze.

"The trail is not there," he murmurs to himself, as he again draws me closer.

I dare not again repeat my question.

"Now, dear, I will go and fetch my hat. I think I left it in Mrs. Bonce's sitting-room. You will not mind waiting here a moment, dear?"

"I will wait, Clifford; only, please do not be long. I do not like this dark room."

"Silly child!" laughs my lover, as he turns away in search of his hat.

Five minutes elapse; then he returns, but hatless.

"Madge, I believe I must go home without it, for I really cannot remember where I left it, and I do not like to disturb Mrs. Bonce. It is very mild out, and I shall not take cold."

He offers me his arm at the same time, and then we turn to leave the library.

"You will not mind coming out the back way, Madge," Clifford says, presently. "It will shorten our walk, and it is already late. Your father will be expecting you, dear."

I am too worn-out to make any demur at this arrangement; but feel I can only submit to anything that Clifford may propose. So in silence we set out from Ellerton Park, and bend our steps homeward.

Arrived there, I take a candle from the hall and repair at once to my own room, where I sink down into my own favourite chair, and go over the events of the past hour.

As I reflect on the late scene my eyes wander up and down my dress and jacket. My dress is a slate-coloured merino of which I have taken great care hitherto, as it is such a good fit, and our village is not noted for good dressmakers; but now, as my gaze wanders up and down the deep kiling of the skirt, I fancy I detect some dark spots, where no such spots should be.

Not being able to satisfy myself upon this point I rise and draw nearer to the light. Yes; there, too surely, are several large spots! Oh, horror! they are red as blood!

Then like a flash of lightning it all dawns upon me, only I can't yet shape my dreadful thoughts into words.

No! I must act—and at once.

Hurriedly blowing out my candle I open my door and descend carefully and cautiously, and so out at the hall door.

Then with winged feet I fly along the road in the direction of Ellerton Park, in at the park gates, up the winding drive till I gain the library windows; then on till the white stone steps of the front entrance come into view in the half-light.

I slacken my speed now, for am I not nearing—What? Gracious Heaven!

There it is! My fearful idea is then realised, and I fall senseless over the lifeless body of Sir Ralph Darrel.

"Madge, are you strong enough to read this?"

It is the first Friday in the new year, and I am lying on the sofa in our pretty drawing-room, where I have been borne in my father's arms for the first time since that dreadful night.

"Yes, father; quite," I reply, as I glance up and note that it is addressed to me in Clifford Ralston's handwriting.

"I will join you again presently, Madge," father says, as, having placed the letter on the table at my side, he goes out, shutting the door behind him.

I lie and gaze at the superscription for a few minutes, then slowly lift one hand and take it up. Another minute, and I am reading slowly down the first page. It is not a long letter, and there is no date or heading to it.

It runs thus:—

"Ere you receive this, Madge, I shall be far, far away. We shall not meet again in this world till I can procure proofs of the real murderer—no need to say whose. But, Madge, I ask one favour at your hands in the meantime—that is to try and bring yourself to firmly believe me when I say that, though my hat was found near the body, that though guilty stains were found on my apparel, still, believe me that I assert nothing but the truth when I again say I had no hand in the crime. Life was assuredly extinct when I placed my hand for the first time on the body after I saw it fall there by the stone steps. Time will prove all. When I can bring you proofs, I repeat, I will come to you and ask for a renewal of—"

Here the letter ends abruptly in a broken sentence, as though the writer—

But I grow faint again!

"Father!"

And then all is darkness once more!

Years have passed. I am growing old, but the whole story has come before me in a dream, and I repeat the word "Father" in my sleep, as the whole miserable tale comes back to me. I am living with my brother, and his two daughters are in the dimly-lighted room.

"Auntie, you have been dreaming, I do believe?" says the eldest, Flo.

"Yes, auntie; you called out 'Father!' so loudly a second since," chimes in Alice.

"I have been dreaming, dear; but it is all over now. Have you gathered your flowers?"

"Yes, auntie; and, see, here is a sweet little bunch of white rosebuds for you to wear to-night."

White rosebuds for me! Vain mocking of brighter and happier days!

But I must not cloud these two smiling faces, so I accept the offered flowers, and, hanging them against my still brown hair, ask, smilingly, if they are becoming for me.

"Very, auntie; I never saw you look so pretty!" cries impulsive Flo, as she throws her arms around my neck and kisses me on both cheeks.

Five hours later and we are amid the festive and gay throng of guests assembled in old Major Hardwicke's spacious rooms.

"There is Paul!" whispers Alice to Flo as we three press onward in the gay crowd towards our hostess.

"Yes, and there is Will!" responds Flo.

Later on in the evening I find myself strolling leisurely along in the conservatory. All the young people are dancing, and we chaperons (of whom there are but few) are free for the time being. On I walk, past huge banks of gay and sweet-scented flowers. I roam till, having gained a rustic seat, I rest awhile.

I am sitting amid the sweet odours of the May-bred flowers, and I can hear from afar

the sound of gay laughter intermingled with the strains of the "Aus die Feme" waltz. I recall my dream of that afternoon.

"The proofs," I murmur, softly, "the proofs! If he would but bring them I might be happy yet! 'Oh, Clifford! Clifford!'" I cry in somewhat louder tones.

And then a something seems to move near me, a rustle amid the screening shrubs, a footstep; then—a man's form is kneeling at my feet!

"Clifford!"

"Madge, I have brought the proofs! Will you see them first?"

"Proofs, Clifford? What care I for proofs? None can strengthen my firm belief in your innocence," I return softly.

"Thank Heaven, Madge! But still I have brought them, or I shouldn't be here. Madge, may I?"

Ere I can utter the monosyllabic affirmative my own true lover's lips are on mine, and the next moment I am sobbing on his breast.

"Madge, dear, I have been too abrupt. I should have waited; but, oh, how I longed to see your dear face once again, and to read on its verdict! Madge, dear, forgive me my thoughtlessness!"

"My tears are tears of thankfulness and joy, Clifford. There is nothing for me to forgive. Can you? You know I doubted you at first, and—"

"Say no more, love!" Clifford fondly whispers, so he rises, and seats himself at my side.

"The dread past is, I trust, as a dream that passeth away, while the future—what of the future, Madge, dear?"

"It shall be as bright and happy as I can make it, Clifford," I reply, quietly, but my love is well satisfied with the look of love which I bestow on him as I speak.

"We will not wait for the New Year, Madge?" he asks presently, after a brief spell of quiet bliss.

"As you will, Clifford," is my simple response.

Then I add in a hushed voice,—

"Burn the proofs, Clifford. But tell me one thing: whose hand—"

"It was a woman's, Madge!"

I ask no farther, but let my head fill its rightful resting-place on the shoulder of my own true love, and I sigh deeply for very happiness.

My tale is nearly ended, but before I close I must add that my two nieces were only too delighted when they heard of my approaching marriage, which came off one bright, fine October morning.

My bouquet was of pure white rosebuds, while conspicuous in its midst stood out the brown and withered remains of the rose gathered by my lover so many seasons previously and preserved so carefully by me, and now assisting at my wedding by his wish.

Further, I would add that my two nieces were only too delighted to act as bridesmaids to their AUNT MADGE.

[THE END.]

PAPER-MAKING IN CHINA.—Eighteen hundred years ago the Chinese made paper from fibrous matter reduced to a pulp. Now each province makes its own peculiar variety. The celebrated Chinese rice paper, that so resembles woollen and silk fabrics, and on which are painted quaint birds and flowers, is manufactured from compressed pith, which is cut spirally by a keen knife into thin slices six inches wide and twice as long. Funeral papers, or paper imitations of earthly things which they desire to bestow on departed friends, are burned over their graves. They use paper window-frames, paper sliding-doors and paper visiting cards a yard long. It is related that when a distinguished representative of the British government visited Peking several servants brought him a huge roll, which, when spread out on floor, proved to be the visiting card of the emperor.

## FACETIAS.

THE whip belongs to the most common variety of team stir.

As the course of true love never runs smooth, it is supposed that there will always be plenty of friction matches in the world.

"No," said Miss Spinster, "I wouldn't have any fool of a man." "And as you cannot get any other kind," remarked Aunt Susan, "you prefer to remain single. Well, I don't know as I blame you."

"Why, you knock the breath out of me!" said the puffing forge bellows to a sturdy blacksmith. "Well, what of it? You're the worst blower I ever tackled," replied the perspiring horse-shoer.

At a dinner party, a young man from the provinces, who was visiting the host, was asked if he was fond of ethnology. "Well, ye-es," he replied at a venture; "but I don't think I'll take any to-night."

"My dear madame," said a doctor to his patient, "I am truly gratified to see you yet in life. At my last visit yesterday, you know I said you had but six hours to live." "Yes, doctor, you did; but I did not take the dose you left me."

NEVER TOO LATE TO MEND.—At the French registrar's office, a wedding party had been waiting a considerable time for the bridegroom. At last he came—an old man about seventy. "Another time," said the registrar, "try to be here a little sooner."

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Mrs. F., "where in the world did I put that reel of silk? I was very careful when I put it away, to have it fixed in my mind where I placed it." "Had it fixed in your mind, did you?" replied Fogg; "but nevertheless, you now seem to be mixed in your mind."

"And that is silver ore, is it?" said Mrs. Snaggs, as she examined a piece of curious-looking mineral. "Yes, my dear," replied her husband. "And how do they get the silver out?" "They smelt it." "Well, that's queer," she added, after applying her nose to the ore; "I smelt it, too, but didn't get any silver."

WIFE (who had been sitting up for delinquent husband): "Are you crazy? Have you been going about the streets with your umbrella up this starlight night?" Weary Husband: "That's just it, dear. It's the stars—perfect avalanche of 'em—couldn't dodge 'em, so—put—up umbrella. Thought people would think I was intoxicated if I didn't."

A YOUNG lady, in telling about the pleasures of her last vacation, said: "Yes, we had a splendid time! Three other girls and I took a tramp through the Lakes." "Did he have a good time, too?" asked one of the listeners. "He!" exclaimed the young lady; "whom do you mean?" "The tramp that you took through the Lakes," quietly answered the gentleman.

KIRRY was studying her Sunday-school lesson, and one of the mottoes she had to learn was: "Walk in—the way of good men." "Mamma," she said, thoughtfully, "papa is a good man, isn't he?" "Certainly, my dear." "Well, I don't see what it means. You always tell me not to get in papa's way, but he is a good man, and this says, 'Walk in the way of good men.' I think it is pretty queer."

A LESSON IN LANGUAGE.—John: "What does Henry do for a living?" James: "His avocation is shoemaking." John: "Vocation, not avocation; a man's regular employment is his vocation; his avocation is what he does occasionally and aside from his principal calling." James: "I thought I made myself clear. I said Henry's avocation was shoemaking; his vocation is hanging around the corner bar and drinking promiscuous drinks at other people's expense."

SWEET home—a bee-hive.

"WHAT do you grow on this land?" he inquired of the farmer who was leaning over a fence inspecting a particularly barren piece of ground. "Grow lazy," was the satisfactory reply.

TIMELY INFORMATION.—"Have you put the important question to old Moneybag's daughter, Jack?" "No. I hear there is a prior attachment there." "You don't say so?" "Yes; the sheriff has attached every thing the old man owns."

JOHNNY WAS JEALOUS.—"Mr. Lighthead," said Johnny, "my sister treats you better'n she does me." "Does she Johnny?" asked Lighthead, with a laugh. "Why do you think so?" "Well, I heard her tell ma she gave you lots of toffy, but she never gives me any."

THE HERO OF A HUNDRED BATTLES.—"I am sure this will suit you," said a newswagoner to a grizzled passenger; "it's Spark's 'History of the Thirty Years War,' and only half-a-crown." "Take it away! take it away!" replied the passenger, vehemently, "I've been married just thirty years myself."

MEN are strange creatures. They will waste an hour hunting a collar button instead of having an extra supply and letting their wife find the missing one. You will never see a woman look for the pin she drops. Her husband finds it when he walks around in his bare feet.

'T WAS NOT WELL.—Man at the water-cooler (pausing reflectively in the midst of a drink): "What kind of water is this?" Native (reassuringly): "That? That's well water." Man at the water-cooler: "You are too sanguine, my friend. This water may be convalescent, but it is gross satire to call it well."

## TWO BUNDLES.

"Vhas I arrested?" softly inquired Mr. Dunder, as he leaned over Sergeant —'s desk yesterday.

"Haven't heard of any such thing. What's the matter now?"

"Vhell, a few days ago a man mit a pundle comes in my place. Vhas I Carl Dunder? I vhas. Dot vhas all right. He prings dot package by express, and der sharge vhas forty cents—sign your name here, and der express company vhas not liable if goods be left more ash six months. Sergeant?"

"Well!"

"Vhat you s'pose vhas in dot pundle?"

"Greenbacks."

"Humph! It vhas a cobbler-stone, und dot fellow shwindles me. I vhas so madt I shump oaf der pool-table. I like to come und see you about it, but if I do, you tell dot nuzzepepper man, und he makes fun of me. Sergeant?"

"Yes."

"Maybe I vhas some lunatic, but I doan' belief him. In two days another man vhalks in mit a pundle. Vhas I Carl Dunder? I vhas. Dot vhas all right. He prings me dot package und der sharge for fife dollar."

"But you didn't pay?"

"Sergeant, I shump on dot man like a cow shump on a leedle sparrow; und in two minutes he vhas sooch a ticked feller dot his own mother doan' tell who he vhas. He leafs dot pundle, und crawls avhay, und when my wife comes home she says it vhas some shirts for me dot she puzs at Metcalfe's!"

"No!"

"Dhot vhas it, sergeant. I send Shake to settle mit der feller for twenty-five dollars, but maybe he haf me arrested peide."

"Singular," remarked the sergeant, after a painful silence.

"Vhell, it strikes me like dot, too. Dis vhas a shtrange country. Nopody vhas two times alike, und if you kick sompody, it vhas der man who doan' deserve him. Good-bye, sergeant. If some warrant comes out for me, und I vhas arrested, I like you to be around, und say to me dot I vhas all o k, und doan' go to shtrate prison for life."



## SOCIETY.

THE Queen will, it is stated, leave England in the spring on a visit to Aix-les-Bains, where she is expected to stay a few weeks. Her Majesty will reside in the Villa Mottet.

THE German Crown Prince and Crown Princess are to meet the Queen at Darmstadt, and the formal betrothal of Prince Henry of Prussia to the Princess Irene of Hesse will then take place.

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE OF WALES will, on Her Majesty's behalf, hold levées at St. James's Palace on Tuesday, March 1, and Friday, March 11.

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE DUKE OF CONNAUGHT arrived at Mhow on January 14, and was received at the station by Gen. Gillespie and the officers of the station and a guard of honour of the 47th Regiment. The Nawab of Jaora was also present. An address of welcome was presented to his Royal Highness by the inhabitants.

THE Queen has been pleased to grant her sanction to the Female School of Art, Queen-square, being entitled "The Royal Female School of Art."

THE Queen has forwarded to Mrs. Kendal a handsome brooch, the design being the royal crown, composed of diamonds, rubies, and sapphires. The gift is in remembrance of Mrs. Kendal's visit to Osborne last month, when she performed before Her Majesty and members of the Royal family.

THE Queen Regent of Spain, whose charitable donations appear inexhaustible, has given 30,000 pesetas to the poor to celebrate the Saint's day of the young king.

THE Queen of Roumania's new story, "Astra," is described as a picture of everyday life, drawn with vigour and fidelity.

THE Emperor of China assumed the government of his dominions on Monday, February 7.

THE Empress of Austria will pay another visit to Amsterdam next month. Her Majesty has purchased a residence in the suburbs, so that her sojourn will now be more agreeable than before. She always derives considerable benefit from the treatment of Dr. Metzger, Her Majesty's ailment being obstinate rheumatic gout.

THE King of the Netherlands will attain his seventieth year on February 19, and great preparations are being made all through Holland in order to celebrate the event. There will be divine service in all the churches, processions will take place, and a number of banquets given. At the Hague, the working men will give a grand concert, at which the king and the queen have promised to be present, and the entertainments for the poor will be on a large scale.

THE Dowager Countess of Iddelesleigh has commissioned Mr. W. Tyler, of Kensington, to execute a statue of the late earl in marble.

THE Shah of Persia is a great hunter, and his favourite game are tigers and bears. In a recent bear-hunt, which took place at Tschem-Tepsh, the Shah was attacked by two bears at once, and he owes his escape to the presence of mind of one of his attendants.

THE Emperor and Empress of Russia gave a grand ball at the Winter Palace on the 28th ult. The electric light was used for the first time, and the effect was extremely brilliant. At nine o'clock most of the guests had arrived, and half-an-hour later the doors were opened to the interior apartments, and the Emperor and Empress, attended by a large and distinguished suite, walked through the apartments in which the guests had assembled, while the Court orchestra played a polonaise.

The polonaise then began, the Emperor leading Lady Morier, the wife of the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg, while the German Ambassador, Gen. Schweinitz, had the honour of being the Empress's partner.

## STATISTICS.

ACCORDING to the London Post Office Directory of last year there are in this city 2,125 Smiths, 1,104 Joneses, 708 Browns, and 467 Robinsons.

GREAT GUNS.—The most enormous guns at present in use are the 105-ton guns on board the Italian ironclads, the four British 100-ton muzzle-loaders at Malta and Gibraltar, and the four 80-ton guns, of which two are afloat and two in situ on Dover Pier. Compared with any of these weapons, the last new English gun of 111 tons recently tried is vastly superior. In length the 80-ton measures 27 feet and the 100-ton 33 feet, and whereas these will penetrate 23 inches of iron at 1,000 yards, the 111-tonner is relied upon to pierce 35 inches at the same distance, and probably 33 inches at over a mile range. From muzzle to breech it measures within a fraction of 44 feet. Although it is nominally a gun of 110 tons, its actual weight is 247,795 lbs., and it will, therefore, be known for the present as the 141-ton gun. Herr Krupp is now making for the Italian land service four guns of greater weight, being 119 tons each, but the peculiar breech fittings in their case take up a great deal of dead metal, and it is not claimed either by Herr Krupp that they will be equal to the work which will be got out of the English gun.

## GEMS.

WE shall be obliged at last to confess that the really precious things are thought and sight, not pace. It does a man no harm to go sometimes slow, for his glory is not at all in going, but in being.

EACH day, each week, each month, each year, a new chance is given you by God. A new chance, a new leaf, a new life, this is the golden, unspeakable gift which each new day offers to you.

THERE appears to exist a greater desire to live long than to live well. Measure by man's desires, he cannot live long enough; measure by his good deeds, and he has not lived long enough; measure by his evil deeds, and he has lived too long.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

AMERICAN MODE OF COOKING RICE.—Pick over the rice and wash it in cold water; to one pint of rice put three quarts of boiling water, and half-teaspoonful of salt; boil it just seventeen minutes from the time it begins to boil; turn off all the water; set it over a moderate fire with the cover off to steam fifteen minutes. Take care and be accurate. The rice-water first poured off is good to stiffen muslins.

BAKED CHICKEN PUDDING.—Cut up two young chickens, and season them with pepper and salt, and a little mace and nutmeg. Put them into a saucepan with two large spoonfuls of butter, and water enough to cover them. Stew them gently, and when about half cooked take them out and set them away to cool. Pour off the gravy, and reserve it, to be served up separately. In the meantime, make a batter, as for a pudding, of a pound of flower stirred gradually into a quart of milk, six eggs well beaten and added by degrees to the mixture, and a very little salt. Put a layer of chicken in the bottom of the baking-dish, and pour over it some of the batter, then another layer of chicken, and then some more batter, and so on, having a cover of batter on the top. Bake till it is brown. Season the gravy, you have set away, with celery, parsley, any sweet herbs you choose, or with chopped oysters; let it boil a short time, and send it to the table in a sauce-boat to eat with the pudding. This dish is very nutritious, and makes chicken go a great way.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

DEER.—A curious habit of deer is that of eating the bones of their own kind. If a dead deer is left on a hill, when birds and insects have eaten its flesh, its bones will often be consumed by its own relations. They will also eat horns that have been shed.

READING CHARACTER.—A French journal describes a new method of reading character, known as "scarpology." It consists in a study of the heels and soles of shoes. If these are worn down evenly the wearer is a good business man, energetic and quick in decision. If the outer side is worn more than the inner he is of an adventurous turn of mind. Weakness of character is indicated by a heel and sole worn most on the inner side.

A MASCULINE OPINION.—The love of women for smart clothing receives at the hands of men that sort of inconsistent criticism which masculine self-sufficiency commonly attributes to the opposite sex. We ridicule the supreme importance that ladies give to their dress; we grumble in our own brutal fashion whenever it is our fortune to pay the bills which this taste entails. But let a woman once neglect her dress, and the masculine eye is ready enough to detect the masculine voice ready enough to denounce it.

THE FOOD OF SWALLOWS.—Swallows take their food exclusively from the air, and they drink when flying. This, so far as is known, to naturalists, cannot be said of any other bird. Various species of gnats and ephemera constitute the food of swallows upon their arrival in this country; but, as summer advances, winged beetles are also greedily taken. So rapidly does the bird capture these that, after it has been on the wing but a few moments, it has accumulated sufficient to form a pellet as large as an ordinary rifle-bullet.

NEW USE FOR PHOTOGRAPHY.—A very curious phenomenon in connection with photography is recorded by the person who observed it. He took a portrait of a child, apparently in full health and with a clear skin. The negative picture showed the face to be thickly covered with an eruption. Three days afterwards the child was covered with spots, due to prickly heat. "The camera had seen and photographed the eruption three days before it was visible to the eye." Another case of a somewhat similar kind is also recorded, where a child showed spots on his portrait, which were invisible on his face a fortnight previous to an attack of smallpox. It is suggested that these cases (if true) might point to a new method of medical diagnosis.

BURIAL CUSTOMS.—A correspondent at Athens gives an account of many curious burial customs peculiar to Greece, which lately came under his notice. A piece of linen as wide as the body and twice as long was doubled, and a hole large enough for the head cut out of it. In this the body was wrapped and then dressed in new clothes, and more especially new shoes. Beneath the head was placed a pillow full of lemon leaves. In the mouth was put a bunch of violets, and around the temples a chaplet of flowers. These are used only for the unmarried, and must be white. Both head and feet were tied with bands made for the purpose, which were unloosed at the edge of the grave, when the coffin was about to be closed. A small coin—a relic of the fee to the ferryman—was placed in the palm of the hand. At Athens a son is dropped into the coffin. The greatest attention is given to this point. In removing the body, the feet always go first. A priest came on three successive days to sprinkle the room, fumigate it, and repeat certain prayers, as for that period after death it was supposed to be haunted. After burial women are hired to keep a light burning over the grave till the body is supposed to be decomposed. To assist this, the bottom of modern Greek coffins is of lattice-work. Every Saturday the poor of Athens place on the graves of their friends estates of the sort they used to like.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MONTIMER.—To improve the complexion, of course.

L. S.—Wash leather gloves are used to keep the hands in good order when doing rough work.

J. M.—Considerably below the average in spelling and penmanship.

L. W.—Not at all improper. Before this reaches you we hope you will have carried out your intention.

DARING JACK.—We regret that our space is fully occupied for some time so come.

FAED.—For indentures of apprenticeship without premium only half-crown stamp is required.

T. L.—Your spare time could be very profitably spent in the practice of penmanship.

W. H.—You would be called a blonde of the Greek type with your fair skin, straight nose, and small mouth.

D. R. W.—No cosmetic will remove wrinkles. Regular habits, exercise in the open air, and the free use of the bath will help to keep them from increasing.

SISTER ANNE.—Your writing is that of a bold, strong character, who is proud but frank, and who will die with a noble record.

ELLEN.—The fact of the young lady being your cousin does not warrant you in taking the liberty of kissing her upon the occasion of the first meeting.

M. C. H.—In the choice of perfumes, a person must be guided by his or her individual taste. First-class lavender water is one of the most delicate and refreshing preparations intended for toilet use.

G. H. makes inquiry first as to the necessity of a chaparron. Is it proper for her to dispense with the presence of a chaparron when she goes to the theatre with a gentleman she had known since childhood? Not without the consent of her parents.

M. H.—If you have grievously offended the gentleman, ask him to excuse you for your rudeness, but do not offer any profuse apologies simply because of a desire to regain his friendship. Your penmanship is only passable.

LEONARD.—It is useless for a man to fritter away his time with a flirt who cares nothing for the feeling of others, being actuated only by a desire to have as many strings to her bow as there are foolish men to be taken in by her hypocritical blandishments.

F. S.—Get a chemist to put up the following compound, and then apply it twice a day to the chiblain: Rectified oil of turpentine, 1 ounce; sulphuric acid, 15 drops; olive oil, 2 ounces. Ordinary paraffin oil has also proved of uniform utility for allaying the inflammation caused by this painful affliction.

L. B. M.—There are no "rules" for winning a lover. Men differ too greatly for any such rules to be of value. Study your suitor's character and try to conform to his ideal of a woman. Do not show an over-anxiety to please. Be "sweet," but also self-respecting. No man esteems a woman who throws herself at his feet.

G. W. H.—Hard work and poor pay is the lot of the majority of those who adopt the stage. However, if you do not believe such to be the case, there is nothing like finding out the truth of the assertion by personal experience. Many an actor—or, more properly speaking, would-be actor—has been cured of his infatuation for the stage after one trial.

G. G. M.—As the foremost dictionary-makers give but one plural form of the word goose, we feel unable to suggest any other, considering that these men were fully aware of what they were doing when they pluralized it goose, no matter whether reference is made to tailors' frocks, the well-known species of birds, or simple-minded persons or simpletons.

S. T. D.—Perhaps your lady-love will like the following:—  
Like the stars above shine her eyes,  
And pearls glimmer bright as she speaks;  
Undine, of old, was not more fair,  
Roses not redder than her cheeks,  
And sweeter than Laura.

G. H. H.—The pay of artists depends so much upon the quality and kind of work that it is difficult to tell what it averages. There is decorative art-work on china, satin, plaques, etc.; portrait-painting, etching, sketching from nature, designing for cars, and designing for illustrated newspapers. A good and rapid sketcher of newspaper designs gets well remunerated usually.

MEO writes to ask if it is her place to call on a lady who has been away on a visit, and with whom she is but slightly acquainted, each having called but once, and she the last time, or if she should wait to have her resume the acquaintance by coming to her home. It is the rule for a lady to call once on any new-comer in a country place, whom she believes to be her equal in a worldly station. The call must be returned, if not, the new resident is supposed to be deficient in etiquette; but it is not necessary that the first caller should visit her again, in fact, it is optional with her whether she continues the acquaintance or not; consequently, it would be improper for you to call until you have again admitted this lady to your household, as her first call might not have been satisfactory, so she wishes to remove your name from her visiting list; but we feel sure such is not the case from your pretty written, lady-like letter.

P. W. D.—The hair enclosed is bronze-brown, a pretty shade.

M. M.—Your writing is too unformed to give any indication of character.

TOM THUMB.—Your writing is that of a strong, methodical person.

F. T.—The tartan or Highland plaid, the dress of the Scottish Highlanders, is said to have been derived from the ancient Gauls or Celts.

L. S. D.—Queen Christina, of Spain, took the oath to be faithful to the heir of the crown, during "his or her" minority, on December 30, 1835.

L. T.—O'Brien House (Isle of Wight), was purchased by Queen Victoria in 1845, and rebuilt. It is known as the Queen's marine villa.

M. B. C. O.—Powdered alum, 2 drachms, and spirits of nitric ether 7, drachms; mixed and applied to the tooth will generally stop its aching.

G. H.—You did not act wisely. Your best course would be to tell the young man that it was thoughtless of you to run off and leave him, and that you regret it.

M. S. S.—To blue gun-barrels, apply nitric acid and let it eat into the iron a little; then the latter will be covered with a thin film of oxide. Clean the barrel, oil, and burnish it.

M. H.—General Joseph Hooker succeeded General Burnside in command of the army of the Potomac on January 26, 1863. He resigned his command on June 27 of the same year, and was succeeded by General Meade.

## LET THE SUNSHINE IN.

Why sit in the corner, oh, desolate mourner,  
Your face turned away from the light?  
Why grieve in such fashion, absorbed in a passion  
Of weeping from morning till night?  
In solitude brooding, the daylight excluding,  
Not thus will contentment begin;  
But though the heart flutters, rise, open the shutters,  
And let the bright sunshine come in!

In rooms that are dusty, ill-smelling and musty,  
The heart may remain to its hurt;  
Of self alone thinking, and visibly shrinking,  
Till thoroughly cold and inert.  
The spiders so daring, your solitude sharing,  
Around your thinning sheets spin,  
But off they will scurry, if you will but hurry,  
And let the bright sunshine come in.

To overcome sadness, go forth with the gladness  
That has its rich sources above,  
To burdened souls bearing some comfort, and sharing  
With them the sweet message of love.  
For thus and thus only, when wretched and lonely,  
May we a blest victory win;  
Our own hearts reviving because of our striving  
To let the bright sunshine come in.

J. P.

SAUCY PET.—Endeavour to set more amiably. More flies are caught by honey than vinegar. Do not be in a hurry to marry. Girls who are modest and amiable are generally sought out by the right kind of men for wives.

C. C. A.—To make fireproof paper, take a solution of alum and dip the paper in it; then throw it over a line to dry. This is suitable to all sorts of paper, whether plain or coloured, as well as textile fabrics. Try a slip of paper in the flame of a candle, and if not sufficiently prepared, dip and try it a second time.

G. H.—Brooklyn, New York, was incorporated in 1646 by the Dutch authorities of New Amsterdam, as New York was then called, and named Breuckelen, from a town of the same name in the Netherlands. It was incorporated as a township under its present name in April, 1806, and as a city in 1834. In 1835, Brooklyn, Williamsburg and Bushwick were united under one government.

E. A. H.—George Jacques Danton, one of the French revolutionists, was a lawyer by profession. He advocated the most violent measures, and was rewarded by being appointed to the Ministry of Justice. He was unquestionably instrumental in bringing about the massacre which ensued. He subsequently resigned his office and became one of the leaders of the revolutionary convention. He was executed in Paris on April 5th, 1794. To the executioner he said, "Show my head to the crowd; it is worth their seeing."

B. C. S.—Backgammon is the modern name of a game of considerable antiquity in England, where it was formerly known by the appellation of "the tables." The origin of the word has been ascribed to the Welsh tongue, in which it is said to signify "little battle;" but competent authorities trace the term to the Saxon *baec* and *gamen* (backgame), so denominated because the performance consists in the two players bringing their men back from their antagonist's tables into their own; or because the pieces are sometimes taken up and obliged to go back—that is, re-enter the opponent's table. In a standard work on all games of cards, twelve 16mo pages are required in the description of this game. It tends to reason, therefore, that we could not give in this place any clear idea of the rules governing the players, and can only advise you to purchase a book of the kind, or get some friend familiar with the game to furnish practical instruction.

G. M. T.—Yellow dock-root is prepared by boiling, and after the juice is all out of this root the water is sweetened with treacle or honey. A wine-glassful is taken every morning.

D. S.—As you have unintentionally offended the gentleman by not recognizing him when you passed, you should make a point of bowing and speaking as pleasantly as you can when you meet him next.

ARTHUR T.—1. The average height of full-grown Englishmen is about 5 feet 6 inches. 2. The height and weight of males at different ages varies greatly, on which account no set average can be truthfully given.

G. C. H.—The frequent use of carbonate of soda as a remedy for heartburn is to be deprecated, as it is very apt to prove injurious to the stomach. One of the simplest and most efficacious remedies for this complaint is the eating of a ripe apple.

SUSIE.—We cannot recommend any anti-fat remedy, and have frequently heard of people being seriously injured by trying to do away with healthy flesh. Exercise in the open air and gymnastic frolics are the best antidotes.

L. J. S.—It is injurious to drink strong coffee three times a day, particularly for a child to do this. A cup of coffee in the morning, and hot milk or kettle tea (that is, hot water, milk, and sugar) for the other meals of the day, is better.

G. H. T.—It is proper, after attending a party or reception, to call upon the hostess during the succeeding week. If the party is merely an informal meeting, as of a club at the house of one of the members, or a small card-party, it is not incumbent upon the guests to call on their entertainers afterwards, though it would not be amiss.

L. M. M.—The smoking of tobacco was, according to some authorities, practised by the Chinese at a very early date, but this claim has never been fully substantiated. Columbus discovered the West Indians indulging in the practice, and it has been prevalent from unknown antiquity among the American Indians as far north as Canada.

E. M. M.—The two brothers, masters of painting on glass, who were very jealous of each other, were Dirk and Wouter Orabeth, natives of Gouda, Holland. They lived in the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century. They painted the windows of St. John's Church at Gouda, and also the windows of other churches in Belgium and Paris. Wouter excelled in correctness and Dirk in brilliancy of colouring.

ROSE F.—When troubled with cold feet at night, use plenty of friction (or rubbing) before getting into bed; and, if that does not answer, then sponge them with cold water, and when drying them, rub the toes and ankles upward, and not downward. In case this plan fails and the feet still remain cold, try putting them in a mustard foot-bath before stepping into bed, and slip on a pair of thick, dry, woolen socks directly afterwards. These latter must be removed as soon as the feet are warm.

B. T.—When mending india-rubber overshoes, observe the following rules: First rub the patch and the edges of the cut or tear with sharp sandpaper; then with a stick or brush smear both with liquid rubber (obtainable at an india-rubber warehouse, or made by dissolving unvulcanized rubber in warm spirits of turpentine, chloroform or benzole) four or five times, letting each coat dry before applying another. Do this once more, and before the surfaces dry, apply the patch, with the pressure of a flat-iron or any handy article.

E. A. A.—You can only bide your time until he makes up his mind to propose marriage. There is no way in which a man can be forced to declare his affection. The majority of women are adepts in the art of pleasing, and by their winning ways can easily captivate one who by word or deed signifies his preference. One thing should be remembered, however, and that is, no woman should, metaphorically speaking, throw herself at the head of the one upon whom she has centred her love, as he will, in all probability, object to such a summary method of capturing his heart, and assume a defensive attitude that is very likely to lead first to distrust, and finally result in a rupture of the intimate relations existing among lovers.

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